WASHINGTON
THE
MAN OF ACTION

by

FREDERICK TREVOR HILL

Illustrated by

JOB

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BY

FREDERICK TREVOR HILL

AUTHOR OF "ON THE TRAIL OF GRANT AND LEE,"
"LINCOLN THE LAWYER," ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
COMTE J. ONFROY DE BREVILLE

JOB

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TO
THE BOYS
OF THE ALF CLUB

The artist hereby gratefully records his thanks to Messrs. Gherardi Davis and Origen S. Seymour and to Mr. Robert H. Kelby, Librarian of the New York Historical Society, for the documents and other valuable material with which they have supplied him and to which he ascribes whatever historical accuracy he may venture to claim for his illustrations.

J. de Breville
(*Job*)

Paris, July, 1913

FOREWORD

IF Washington had elected to act as his own biographer, it is probable that far less would have been written and far more would be known of his real life and character. As it is, however, the number of books concerned with his career is out of all proportion to the amount of information they contain, and the value of such facts as they do record is, only too often, hopelessly impaired by a gross alloy of eulogy and fiction.

This condition of affairs is, of course, by no means unique. Many other famous men have suffered similar misrepresentation at the hands of ambitious scribes and over-enthusiastic

hero-worshipers. But Washington was particularly unfortunate in having for his earliest biographer a not too scrupulous gentleman-of-the-cloth who gave free rein to his imagination and scored one of the most astonishing popular successes ever achieved by a literary charlatan.

The natural result of this pernicious example was to tempt a veritable army of irresponsible scribblers into the field, and the mass of sentimental twaddle, convenient "tradition" and barefaced invention which they heaped up before serious-minded students of history had even begun to investigate the record, accounts, in no small measure, for much of the popular misconception of Washington.

The scholarly research which has done so much to restore the real man to the world is

not as familiar to the public as it should be, and it is by no means complete. New letters and documents are being discovered every day. But almost enough has already been unearthed by the able historians who have devoted themselves to this task to give us Washington's own story of his life, for he left a journal, several diaries and Orderly Books, and such a wealth of private correspondence and public papers that the volumes containing them now form quite a library of themselves.

All this authoritative material—which, read together, is virtually Washington's Autobiography—is now available to the special student, if not to the general reader, and the pages that follow are largely based upon this original source of information.

FOREWORD

The writer gratefully acknowledges his indebtedness to the distinguished French artist, the Comte de Breville ("Job"), whose careful study of the history of the times is apparent in the scenes he so spiritedly portrays, and to Samuel Palmer Griffin, Esq., for his scholarly revision of the text and close verification of the authorities relied on therein.

FREDERICK TREVOR HILL.

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WASHINGTON
THE MAN OF ACTION

CHAPTER I

A COUNTRY BOY AND HIS PEOPLE

VIRGINIA was singularly fortunate in the type of colonist that was attracted to her shores in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and some of the best blood of England was represented among her early settlers.

To cross the Atlantic in those days was no pleasure trip. It was a hazardous journey which only the hardy and adventurous dared at-

tempt, and the land beyond the treacherous ocean was, at best, but a promising wilderness, peopled largely by savages and girt with all the terrors of the unknown. It is not to such fearsome solitudes that men go to prate of rank or family names. The builders of new worlds are usually men of courage, enterprise and independence, with a spirit of conquest in their veins which craves an outlet, and the English colonials were largely recruited from this class. Those who had inherited sterling virtues did not need to advertise that fact. They had

unbounded opportunities for proving their metal, and the staying qualities of good breeding asserted themselves in many a Virginian pioneer.

Of such stock were the Washingtons of Westmoreland County. Few settlers could boast a better Old World lineage than they, but so little did they pride themselves on their family history that they had almost forgotten it by the seventeen hundreds, and it is doubtful if George Washington knew anything of his ancestry beyond the fact that his father and grandfather had made

honorable records for themselves in Virginia.

At the time of the birth of his famous son (February 22, 1732), Augustine Washington was a planter living in a very simple fashion on one of his three farms called "Wakefield," on the Potomac River. Shortly after this event, however, he moved to another of his plantations known by the Indian name "Epsewasson" (Hunting Creek), and later rechristened Mount Vernon, in honor of the famous Admiral Vernon. Here Washington passed the first eight years of his

life, free of schoolrooms and books, but learning all that outdoor life, at the edge of the wilderness, could teach a healthy boy.

To ride well was no distinction in Virginia, but even as a very little lad Washington's horsemanship attracted attention, and as he grew older he steadily improved until he was regarded as a veritable expert. In shooting and fishing he was not so proficient, but he learned a good deal concerning the habits of animals and fish from the Indians who haunted the neighborhood, and from the same instructors he likewise ac-

quired much of his knowledge of woodcraft, all of which information stood him in good stead in the hunting field and, many years later, in his military campaigns.

It was a sad day for the boy when the house on Hunting Creek burned down, for with the move to his father's third plantation on the Rappahannock River, near Fredericksburg, his freedom was seriously curtailed by the necessity of attending school. He had no reason to complain, however, when he mounted his pony and rode off to the log cabin which housed his first school,

Washington Riding to the "Old Field" School (1740)

for few youngsters reach the age of eight untroubled by lessons or book learning of any kind. But the wisdom of his parents in exempting him from all study up to that age was fully demonstrated by the bodily strength which he acquired in those vitally important years, and by the ease with which he assimilated his primary education once it was begun.

His first instructor was a man transported from England for some minor offense and sold to Mr. Washington or his neighbors, who had made him sexton of the church and

master of the local "Old Field" School. It is not probable that this queer schoolmaster was much of a scholar, but he apparently had a knack for teaching, and he certainly had an apt pupil in Washington. Indeed the lad had not been at school very long before he was able to write his name in a good, round hand, as is clearly proved by an old book of sermons (now in the Boston Athenæum), on the fly leaf of which the young penman, evidently proud of a new accomplishment, practised his signature not once, but many times.

Three years later his father died, so that from about his twelfth to his sixteenth year the boy was directly under his mother's guidance. That she was a strong, forceful character does not admit of doubt, and her government of the lad was all that could be desired. Well disciplined and accustomed to obey and respect his parents from his earliest years, he was gradually taught to assume responsibility for the younger children and to aid his mother in the management of the household and the plantations, part of which, by the terms of his father's

will, he was to inherit when he became of age. But land was worth very little in Virginia unless good use was made of it, and the boy was brought up with a thorough understanding that he would be obliged to earn his own living as soon as he had finished school.

At one time he expressed an inclination for a sailor's life, and as his half brother, Captain Lawrence Washington, heartily approved of this and offered to procure him a suitable commission, he would probably have gone to sea at the age of about fourteen had not his mother

positively forbidden him to consider such a career. But, although Mrs. Washington differed with Captain Lawrence on this occasion, she had good reason to be grateful to him and to her other stepson, Augustine, for the interest they displayed in her boy. Indeed it was most fortunate that he should have come under the influence of these young men at this period, for two cleaner, manlier fellows never lived.

Lawrence was a retired army officer and Augustine was a planter when Washington finished his elementary studies and entered a school

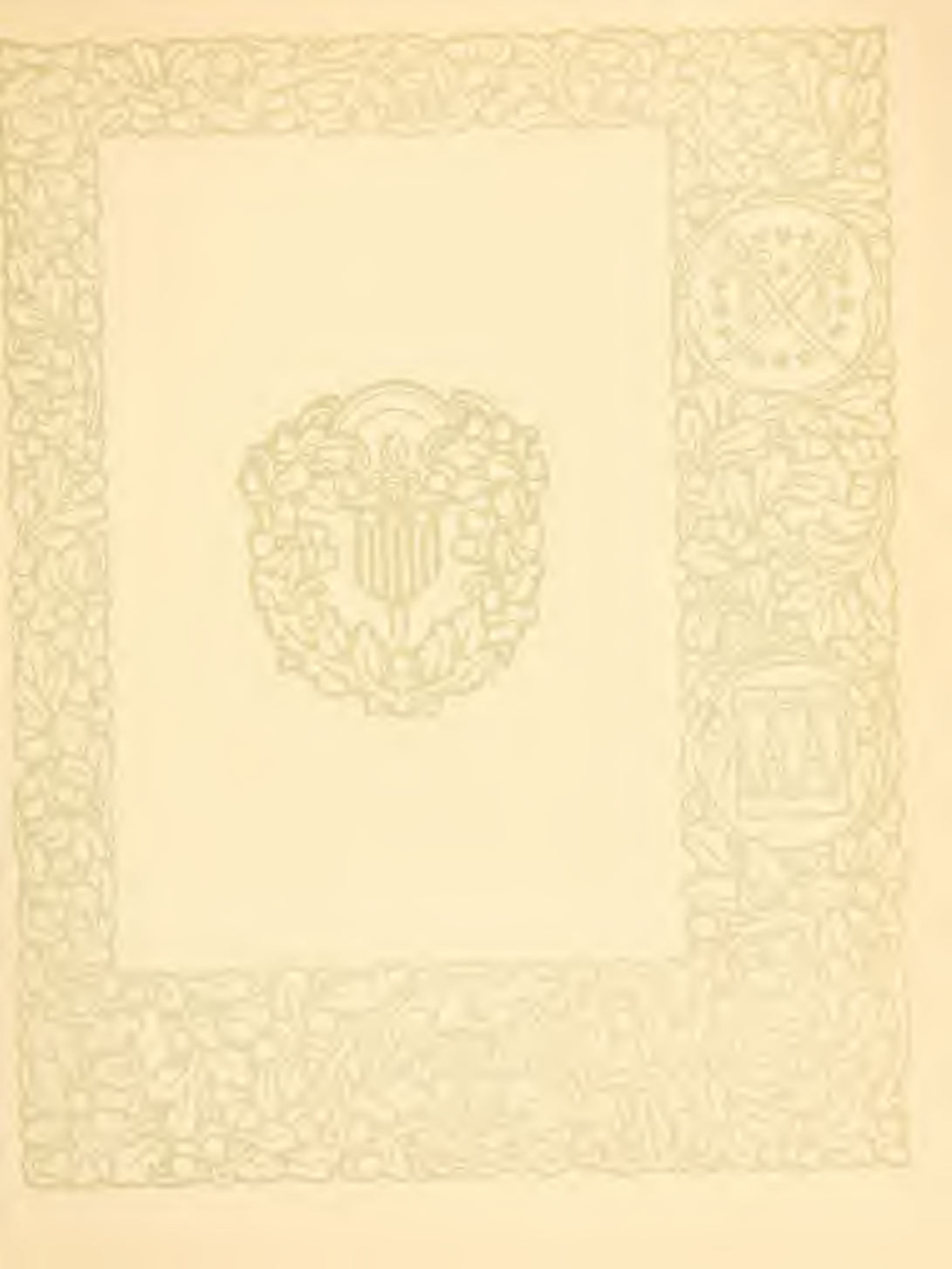
kept by a Mr. Williams near the "Wakefield" plantation then occupied by his half brother Augustine. Here the boy lived for a time and soon became a favorite with his host and his brother, who, finding him apt in every sort of sport, made him their constant companion and encouraged him in all that makes for manliness and good breeding. Both men had been educated abroad and knew the ways of the world, and the unconscious instruction their young relative received at their hands did much toward making him not only a man, but a gentle-

man in the best sense of the word.

The brothers were not alone in this service, however, for while Washington was visiting Captain Lawrence he was introduced to Lord Fairfax, an old and somewhat eccentric bachelor, who took a great fancy to the lad. Lord Fairfax was a graduate of Oxford who had come to Virginia on a business visit and had fallen in love with the country which he thenceforth made his home. His hobby was fox hunting, and it was, perhaps, Washington's horsemanship which first attracted

his notice. At all events, the old gentleman promptly invited him to join in his straight-across-country hunts, and, finding him not only a good rider but a promising lad, he became interested in his future and finally gave him his first business opportunity.

By this time Washington was attending an excellent school at Fredericksburg kept by a Mr. Marye, under whom he studied, among other things, the art of surveying. This work evidently appealed to him more than anything else, for at the age of fourteen he surveyed



Surveying Beyond the Blue Ridge Mountains
(1748)

the Mount Vernon plantation, as appears from the map still in existence, and took special lessons from Mr. James Genn, the official surveyor of the county, some of whose surveys for these years which have been preserved were obviously transcribed by Washington himself.

It thus came about that when Washington was nearing his sixteenth birthday, Lord Fairfax offered to employ him on the survey of his property beyond the Blue Ridge Mountains, and with the glad acceptance of this opportunity for

experience and profit the boy's school days ended and his life as a surveyor began.

CHAPTER II

A SURVEYOR IN THE SADDLE

IT is not to be supposed that Lord Fairfax intrusted the surveying of his distant estate entirely to a young boy like Washington. He was, of course, merely one of those to whom this very difficult and arduous task was committed, the party including Mr. Genn, the licensed surveyor of Westmoreland County; Col. George Fairfax, one of his lordship's relatives, and a

number of woodsmen and guides. Careful preparations had to be made for the trip, as the land beyond the Blue Ridge was an almost inaccessible wilderness, and merely to journey there and back entailed an absence of several weeks.

It was, therefore, necessary to procure suitable packhorses and load them with all that was essential for the expedition without overburdening them for the difficult mountain trails. In this work Washington took an active part and everything he learned proved of the utmost value to him before

many years had passed. Indeed this initial experience in roughing it apparently cured him of any conceit in his own knowledge of woodcraft, for the daily journal which he kept on the trip shows that he made all the mistakes which a tenderfoot usually makes, and the humorous vein in which he recorded his blunders demonstrates that he accepted them in the right spirit.

The surveyors met with no serious misadventure on the trip, and though they encountered several Indians, some of whom had obviously been on the warpath, the

red men merely displayed curiosity in their work and did not attempt to molest them in any way. Washington accordingly improved the occasion to make friends with the savages and to learn all he could of their customs. In fact, at the end of a month he had managed to increase his knowledge of Indian lore very considerably, and by the time he returned to the settlement he was a good woodsman and a better surveyor. Certainly the written report which he handed to his employer must have made a very favorable impression on Lord Fairfax, for he

strongly encouraged his protégé to persevere in this work and later aided him to procure a license conferring official authority upon his surveys.

For the next three years, therefore, the young man practically lived in the open, often making long, lonely journeys on horseback to remote parts of the colony, and the character of his work was such that he was soon earning seven dollars and upwards a day, his services being constantly in demand. This life in the saddle not only vastly improved his woodsmanship

but gave him an unusual opportunity for judging the prospective values of land, in the purchase of which he utilized all his spare savings.

Meanwhile he made his headquarters at Captain Lawrence Washington's house where he met an ex-officer named Adjutant Muse, who gave him some instruction in military science, and a retired sergeant named Van Braam, who taught him how to fence. It was doubtless Captain Lawrence who suggested that his kinsman should thus employ himself, as he wished

With Braddock's Rear Guard
(July 7-8, 1755)

to qualify him for a commission in the colonial army. The result was that by the time the young man was nineteen he was appointed a military inspector, with the rank of Major, at a salary of a hundred and fifty pounds a year. It is plain, however, that Washington himself had no intention of adopting a soldier's life when he accepted this post, the duties of which were merely nominal. Indeed he continued his work as a surveyor until responsibilities imposed on him by Captain Lawrence's illness and death compelled him to abandon

it, and it was not until he was nearly twenty-two that an event occurred which entirely changed his career.

CHAPTER III

OPPORTUNITY

YEARS before his death Captain Lawrence Washington had foreseen trouble between the French and the English, for the trading company in which he was interested claimed land on the Ohio River to which France asserted a paramount right, and he saw that it was only a question of time when the two governments would be drawn into the controversy. The French were

the first to realize this, however, and before the English colonial authorities awoke to the situation their rivals had erected a fort on the disputed territory, and rumor had it that they were attempting to persuade the Indians to support them in the pending quarrel with England. Governor Dinwiddie of Virginia promptly dispatched an officer to locate this fort and lodge a protest against its erection, but his representative speedily returned without accomplishing his mission, and his report plainly showed that no one but a skilful woodsman, familiar

with Indian customs, would succeed in making his way to the French and checking their intrigues with the red men.

At this crisis some one advised the Governor that young Mr. Washington, who had lately been appointed as one of the colonial adjutant-generals, was well qualified for the work at hand. This suggestion evidently appealed to His Excellency, for he summoned the young man and directed him to proceed at once to the headquarters of the French forces, deliver a letter of protest to the Commandant, and

warn the Indians not to be drawn into any quarrel with the English who were disposed to remain upon friendly terms with them.

A tenderfoot, anxious to display his zeal, would, perhaps, have rushed posthaste into the wilderness on receiving such instructions, but Washington was too thoroughly schooled in forest life for any mistake of that kind. With the utmost care he selected his party, which included Van Braam, his old fencing master, and Christopher Gist, a noted guide; and by forestalling every need of the expedition, from

snowshoes for his men to suitable presents for the Indians, he insured not only the comfort of himself and his party but the success of the important duty with which he was charged. Indeed had he neglected those details he might as well have remained at home, for snow was soon encountered and the Indians proved very punctilious in regard to every diplomatic ceremony. In fact, it was only by observing the utmost tact with the redskins that he was enabled to persuade the most important of their chiefs to stand by the English in the coming conflict,

and all his woodcraft was required before he reached the French fort in safety.

Once there he made the best use of his ears and eyes, delivered his dispatch to the commanding officer, received a very polite but defiant response, and made careful preparations for his return trip, which he foresaw would be fraught with no little danger. But even with all his precautions he barely escaped disaster, for soon after he turned his face southward he was almost drawn into an ambush by a treacherous Indian guide who attempted

The Battle of Monongahela
(July 9, 1755)

to shoot him when he found he could not lure him off the trail. From that time onward the home journey was practically a race for life, but after much suffering and privation he reached the city of Williamsburg in safety, and his written report was promptly delivered to the Governor in person.

That document was a remarkable production for a young man of twenty-two, for it was a full, accurate and clear exposition of the entire situation, both from a military and a political point of view. Indeed it was regarded as so impor-

tant that it was printed and published as a governmental record, and its author was promptly rewarded with a lieutenant-colonelcy in the colonial army.

CHAPTER IV

A CALL TO ARMS

FROM the moment the French Commandant's defiant reply to Governor Dinwiddie's message had been received war was inevitable, and Colonel Washington was speedily ordered to march at the head of about a hundred and fifty raw recruits to the relief of a certain Captain Trent who, sometime previously, had been ordered to erect a fort on the Ohio River and who

was reported to be sorely in need of reinforcements to enable him to hold his ground. This officer, however, was the very man who had proved unequal to the task of locating the French Commandant, and before Washington could reach him he abandoned his post to the advancing enemy.

Regarding this hostile move as a declaration of war on the part of France, Washington pushed boldly forward, confident of his ability to punish the aggressors or at least to prepare the way for the rest of his regiment. In this he counted strongly

on the arrival of the Indian allies he had enlisted on his mission to the French fort, and even when he learned that the enemy was advancing in force he continued to press onward. The Indians, however, were tardy in putting in an appearance, so he halted behind intrenchments. But when at last the redskins did arrive they mustered only a handful of warriors. Nevertheless, hearing that the advance-guard of the French was approaching, Washington sallied forth and, surprising it, killed, wounded or captured almost the entire party.

Then, flushed by this little success, he again pressed forward. But by this time his provisions were failing and the Indians were weakening, so he soon deemed it prudent to fall back on his intrenchments at Great Meadows, which he barely reached before the French, in overwhelming numbers, appeared and opened fire. There was nothing to be done under these circumstances but to make terms with the enemy, and after holding out for a day, he answered a flag of truce by agreeing to retire with all the honors of war.

It would not have been surprising

Washington's Orderly Awaiting His Master
at the Home of Mrs. Martha Custis
(July, 1758)

if the young commander had been censured for his reckless conduct on this occasion, but enthusiasm for the war was running high in the colony when he returned and he was acclaimed as a hero. Indeed he was even given a vote of thanks for the courage with which he had stuck to his post. But the unmerited praise did not blind him to his error of judgment, and from this reverse, at the very opening of his military career, he learned a lesson which he never afterwards forgot.

CHAPTER V

IN THE FACE OF DISASTER

ALTHOUGH no formal declaration of war was issued until some time after the affair at Great Meadows, the British home government soon assumed entire charge of the campaign. The immediate result of this was to render all colonial officers subordinate to the regulars. Washington, therefore, at once resigned his commission and retired to his plantation, from which, however,

he was soon summoned by an invitation to join General Braddock's staff as a volunteer without loss of rank. This honor was obviously tendered him merely because of his knowledge of the country. But it afforded just the opportunity he desired for enlarging his military experience, so he gladly accepted it, and promptly joining the General at headquarters, he watched the drilling of the regular troops and inspected their equipment with unfeigned admiration. Never had he seen such perfectly disciplined men or such smart accoutrements, and

never before had he met an officer whose military experience and reputation could be compared with Braddock's.

His enthusiasm, however, received a severe check when he observed the preparations which were being made for the campaign. Doubtless from a European standpoint all that was done was absolutely correct, but, considering the nature of the country through which the small army would have to travel, it was obvious to his experienced eyes that the amount of baggage and the character of the ordnance provided for the expedition

were absurd. Moreover, the route selected for the march was by no means the best, and after some hesitation the young Virginian ventured upon a few suggestions. He soon found, however, that his advice was not particularly welcomed; but he was not actually repulsed, and becoming still further disturbed as time wore on, he protested more and more vigorously until Braddock began to show annoyance.

The expedition was, therefore, handicapped at the very start by poor roads and worse equipment—all of which was realized before the

first day's march was done. Nevertheless, the over-burdened column struggled on, many of its number becoming ill, and among others Washington himself. Indeed for a while he was forced to abandon the march altogether, and then, fearing that he would arrive too late for the prospective battle, he mounted into one of the provision wagons, and thus kept in touch with the troops.

Meanwhile Braddock had seen the impossibility of dragging his heaviest cannon through the wilderness and had acted on his aide's advice to the extent of abandoning

all but the light field guns. Nothing could persuade him, however, to adopt the colonial methods of protecting himself against surprise by throwing out a strong skirmish line to search the woods for Indian ambushes. Indeed when Washington caught up with the advance-guard the troops were preparing to cross the Monongahela River in a solid column, although a collision with the French and their red-skinned allies was to be expected at any moment.

This prospect stirred the Virginian volunteer to action and,

instantly mounting, he reported for duty, arriving just in time to see the vanguard cross the river with flags flying and drums beating as though on dress parade. It was unquestionably a magnificent spectacle, but as the young officer watched it with swelling pride, a puff of smoke from the woods, followed by the sharp crack of a rifle, made his heart stand still, and almost before he could wheel his horse the forest was ablaze with the fire of a well-hidden foe.

There was only one chance of saving the men from the deadly

Washington and His Bride on Their Way to the "White House" (January 6, 1759)

ambuscade into which they had obviously fallen, and that was to order them to spread out and take cover behind the trees as the Virginian contingent had done at the very first shot. But though Washington implored Braddock to adopt this course, the brave but obstinate officer would not listen to what seemed to him like cowardly tactics, and he actually attempted to make his troops rally around the colors, where they were shot down by the score. Washington strove hard to prevent this slaughter, and two horses fell beneath him and four

bullets passed through his clothing as he struggled to bring some of the field pieces into action. But before the guns were in position panic seized upon the huddled troops, many of whose officers, including Braddock, had already fallen, and they streamed pell-mell from the scene, cutting the traces of the artillery horses and fleeing on them across the river.

It was impossible to check this headlong flight, and Washington confined his efforts to covering the retreat with his little band of Virginians. Had the French and

Indians pursued they could have played havoc with the fugitives, but they paused to secure scalps and other trophies of victory, and Washington took advantage of this opportunity to slip away and overtake the retreating rabble, of which he assumed charge in default of a ranking officer. As a matter of fact, there were scarcely any officers left, no less than sixty having fallen in their heroic efforts to save the day, and before the defeated remnant of the army had reached a point of safety Braddock died of his wounds. Washington read the burial service

at his unfortunate commander's grave, over which the troops were marched and countermarched to obliterate all signs of it from the supposedly pursuing foe. But there was no pursuit, and the survivors finally reached the reserve column unmolested.

CHAPTER VI

SIX YEARS OF PEACE

NO one except the Virginians came out of this disastrous campaign with any credit, for the ambush had been effected by a mere handful of French and Indians who might easily have been dispersed. Washington, however, received much credit for the coolness and courage with which he had covered the retreat and he was soon offered the supreme command of the local

forces. This was an extraordinary honor for a man not yet twenty-four years of age, but he was by no means anxious to continue his army career and it was with considerable reluctance that he finally accepted the appointment. The two years that followed brought him little or no active service in the field, but they gave him invaluable experience in maintaining an army under adverse conditions, and finally he had the satisfaction of leading his troops into the smoking ruins of Fort Duquesne, whose surrender by the French brought the

long war to a close and ended for the time his military career.

Meanwhile Washington had met Mrs. Martha Custis, a young widow at whose house he had been entertained on one of his hurried official journeys to Williamsburg. This chance meeting with the lady had been rapidly followed by several calls, the duration of which is said to have sorely taxed the patience of his faithful body-servant, Bishop, who had been Braddock's orderly, and who invariably attended his new master on these visitations. Washington's

courtship, however, was very brief, there being love at sight on both sides, and within a few days after he had first met Mrs. Custis his engagement to her was announced.

The marriage, which was attended by the Governor and many distinguished Virginians, took place about six months after the campaign closed, and at the conclusion of the ceremony the bride was driven in a coach and four, attended by Washington on horseback and accompanied by a brave cavalcade, to her country residence known as the

Washington as His Own Gamekeeper (1760-70)

"White House." Here the newly married couple resided for a time and then moved to Williamsburg so that Washington might attend the sessions of the House of Burgesses, to which he had been elected during the war.

To be numbered among the lawmakers of Virginia at the age of twenty-six was a signal honor. But the young legislator was not sorry when the session closed, for he was anxious to renew his life as a planter, and at the earliest possible moment he started for Mount Vernon, which he had in-

herited from his father and which he had always intended to make his permanent home. Indeed the moment he arrived at the scene of his boyhood days he began carrying out the plans he had long had in mind for establishing a model plantation, and for six happy years he devoted himself to this task.

In all this Mrs. Washington seconded his efforts most efficiently, for much of the management of a successful Virginian plantation in those days devolved upon the mistress of the house. But busy as both she and her hus-

band were, they contrived to make time for social duties and kept such open house for all the country-side that Mount Vernon became the very center of gayety and sport. There the meets of the fox-hunters were held, there all the neighborhood gathered at balls and dinners and there every distinguished traveler was entertained with true Virginian hospitality.

These and other diversions might well have tempted Washington to entrust the details of his business to others. But, on the contrary, he continued to superintend it with

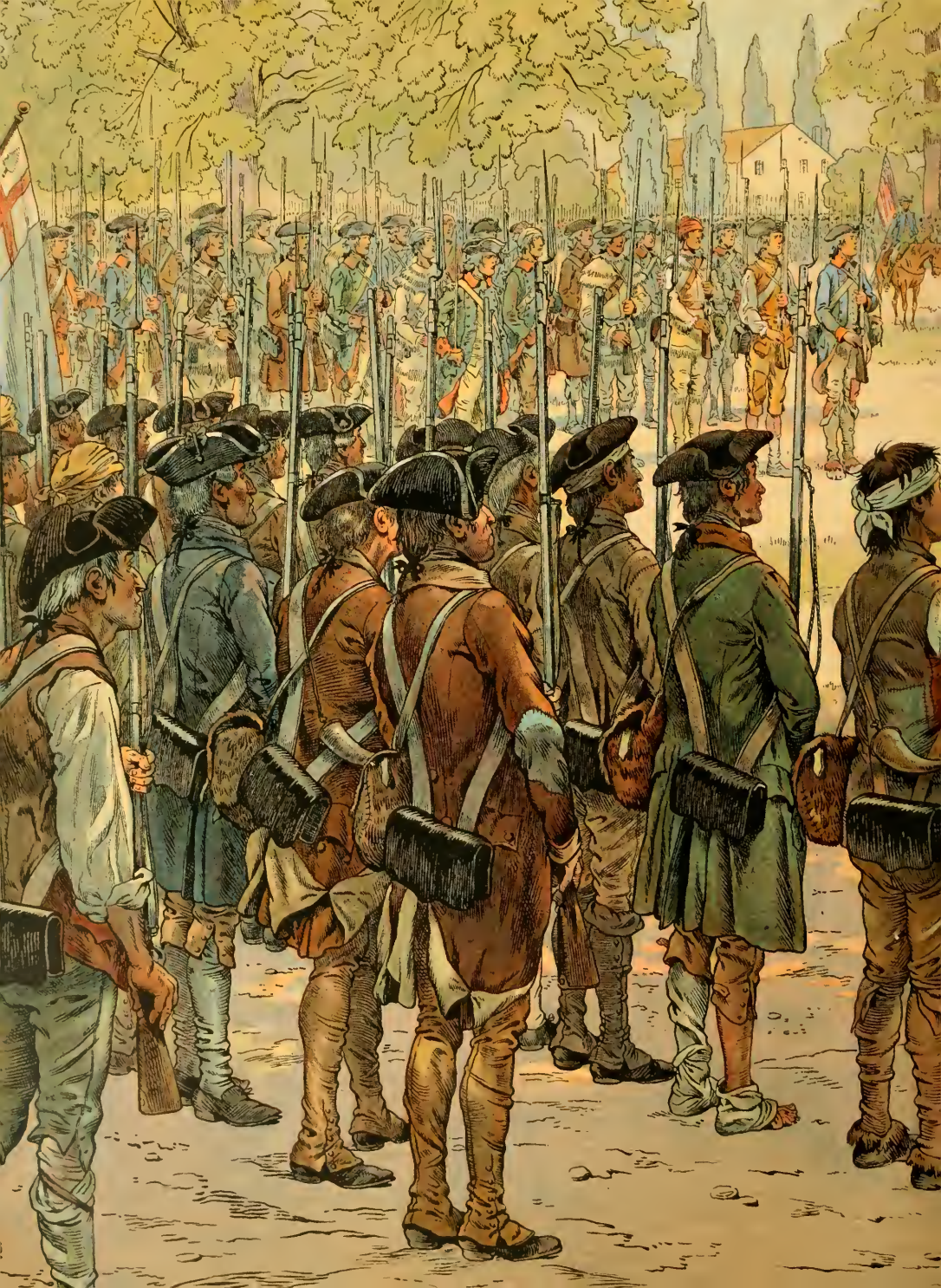
the most minute care, until his reputation as a planter was so firmly established that his brands of flour and tobacco brought the highest prices on the market and were passed without government inspection, not only at home, but abroad. From early dawn till sunset he was constantly in the saddle directing his workmen, planning improvements and experimenting with crops. On one occasion he even acted as his own gamekeeper, for, discovering a poacher at work in one of his streams, he sprang into the water and, undeterred by the intruder's leveled

rifle, seized the prow of his canoe and drove him to flight.

A mere glance at Washington's careful diary and the orderly correspondence which he maintained at this period is sufficient to show what a genius for system and what high executive capacity he possessed. But even with these rare qualities at his command, the amount of work which he accomplished each day was truly astonishing. That he did it easily and still had time for recreation is an object lesson for every one who longs for a twenty-fifth hour in the day.

From the very outset of his career as a planter his official duties had demanded far more time than a selfish man would have been willing to spare, but as the years rolled by the attitude of England toward the colonies drew him more and more into the public service. At the House of Burgesses he was in constant attendance, listening closely to the arguments of Patrick Henry and other orators, though seldom taking part in the debates, which were becoming sharper and bolder with every session. But his actions spoke louder than words, for when

Taking Command of the Army at Cambridge
(July 3, 1775)



the legislature was dissolved by the Governor for having ventured to protest against the home government's actions he himself proposed an embargo on tea and certain other articles imported from England, and never afterwards permitted the forbidden merchandise to be used at Mount Vernon under any pretext whatsoever. Again, when the Burgesses protested against the dispatch of British troops to Boston and were once more dismissed for their pains, he voted for a day of fasting and prayer and observed both the letter and the spirit of his vote.

Two months later, at a meeting held to elect delegates to the Continental Congress, he made a short but exceedingly characteristic speech. "I will raise a thousand men, enlist them at my own expense and march myself at their head for the relief of Boston," he announced to the assembled company. Those few words plainly demonstrated that, in his opinion, the hour for action had arrived. But this view was not shared by the majority of his hearers, and when, almost a year later (May 3, 1775), he left Mount Vernon to attend

the second Continental Congress at Philadelphia, he little dreamed that he was not to see his home again for eight long years.

CHAPTER VII

THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

THE news of the Battle of Lexington reached Washington while he was still on his way to Philadelphia. He accordingly doffed his citizen's attire and appeared in the convention hall attired in his old blue and red regimentals. That, to his mind, best expressed the requirements of the situation. But even then his associates were not willing to take up the gage of battle, and

a month passed before they were forced to do so by the obvious necessity for providing the armed mob which surrounded Boston with some military leadership. Several colonies had candidates for this honor, but Virginia's claims were recognized as superior to those of any other and her choice was Washington, who, on June 15, 1775, was unanimously elected Commander-in-Chief.

It was with no elation that the new general learned of his appointment. He knew, as few did, the innumerable difficulties that lay

before him and felt anything but confident of his ability to surmount them. Nevertheless he accepted the duty with a few modest words, declining all offers of payment for his services and, confiding his family and business to his brother's care, hastened to Cambridge, where he arrived on July 2, 1775. The next day, amid scenes of wild enthusiasm, he assumed his duties as head of the citizen army which had just proved its metal at the Battle of Bunker Hill.

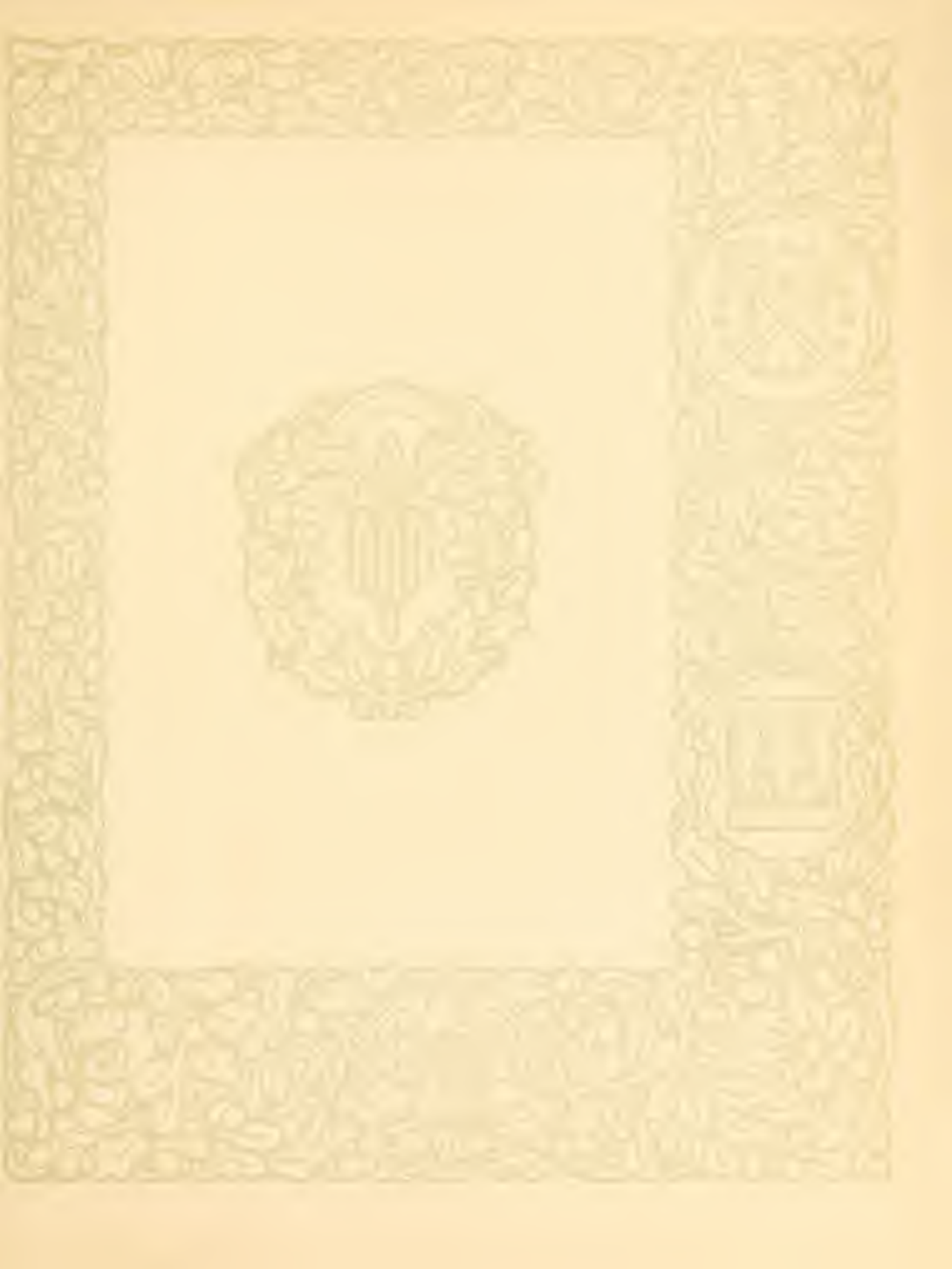
As far as bravery and patriotism were concerned, the American troops

left nothing to be desired. But save in these particulars they were most wofully equipped. Indeed Washington had not been long at the front before he learned that there was scarcely enough ammunition on hand for a sharp skirmish, and had Gage (his former comrade in the Monongahela campaign), who then commanded the British in Boston, known of this he could have raised the siege of the town with almost ridiculous ease.

But aghast as the new Commander-in-Chief was at this alarming situation, he instantly met it by

maneuvering his men so that his opponent would conclude that he was preparing for an assault. This bold ruse was highly successful and while certain officers and men were dispatched to Ticonderoga to procure the siege guns recently captured at that post, others were ordered to scour the country for powder and ball, with the result that before long a reasonable amount of ammunition was secured and all immediate danger of ignominious capture was averted.

But other dangers rapidly appeared, for the troops, enlisted only



Reading the Declaration of Independence to the Army (July 9, 1776)

for three months, began to return to their homes, and what little training and discipline they had received went with them. Thus, under the very eyes of the enemy, the harassed commander was obliged to disband one army and recruit another—a task which would probably have been an impossibility for any other military leader.

But Washington was not only a soldier; he was a man who, by close application, had trained himself to meet emergencies and to devise ways and means of overcoming difficulties. For two years after Braddock's

defeat he had kept a makeshift army in the field and for six years he had molded a large body of workmen into the most effective business organization in Virginia. All this training was now utilized to create an army out of raw material, and so tirelessly did he supervise every detail of the work that a second force, far more formidable than the first, both in numbers and discipline, was confronting Boston when the long-looked-for cannon arrived upon the scene.

Up to this moment Washington had had no opportunity to display

his military talents. But he now decided on one of those swift moves for which he afterwards became famous. Making a pretended attack on one side of the town he seized Dorchester Heights on the other side, and before his opponents realized what was happening they discovered that Boston lay helpless under the cannon he had dragged into position upon those commanding hills.

Flight or capture were the only alternatives for General Howe, who, by that time, had taken charge of the British forces, and, hastily em-

barking his troops on the waiting fleet, he abandoned Boston, of which Washington formally took possession on March 17, 1776.

CHAPTER VIII

SURPRISE AND ESCAPE

THE evacuation of Boston, though gratifying for the encouragement which it gave to the supporters of the American cause, did not render Washington overconfident. He knew that the British would speedily seek compensation for their loss by the capture of one of the other Atlantic seaports, and he was not, therefore, at all surprised when he learned that General

Howe's army was headed for New York. The task of defending that city without ships or forts was almost impossible, but, gathering up whatever troops could be spared from Boston, the American commander arrived in New York well in advance of the enemy.

There was no time to prepare any really formidable defences, but barricades were erected, lead was torn from the roofs of houses to make bullets, and cannon were posted along the river front. For a time it was hoped that these guns would prevent the British ships from sail-

ing past the city and landing troops at the upper end of the town to cut off a retreat. But the first hostile vessels that attempted to slip past the water batteries did so with ease, and Washington thereafter confined his efforts toward opposing the advance of Howe's army which had been temporarily landed on Staten Island.

To this end he concentrated his troops on the Long Island shore, throwing up intrenchments on the Brooklyn Heights, and otherwise preparing for a stout resistance. Meanwhile Congress proclaimed the

independence of the colonies, and on July 9, 1776, he assembled his troops in the fields which have since become City Hall Park, and there the Declaration of Independence was read to them by their officers, amid scenes of wild enthusiasm.

By this time the British Government had begun to realize the serious nature of the conflict that lay before it, and Lord Howe, Admiral of the fleet, was intrusted to open negotiations for an adjustment of the difficulties. Unfortunately, he began by sending a letter to the American commander, addressed to *Mr.* Wash-

The Retreat from Long Island
(August 29, 1776)

ington—a studied insult which the General could not disregard without a loss of dignity to the country he represented. He therefore promptly returned the missive unopened and, though Howe later renewed his advances in proper form, nothing was accomplished.

Then the long expected campaign opened with a brilliant move by General Howe, who suddenly landed a powerful force at Gravesend Bay, near Brooklyn. Washington was, at this time, in New York, but he hurried across the river and, giving minute orders for watching the roads

to prevent a surprise, placed General Israel Putnam in command and returned to headquarters. For a few days the British remained quietly within their lines, and then the very thing of which Washington had warned his subordinates gave the enemy an opening. By some mischance or negligence one road was left unguarded, and by this the British approached unseen and unsuspected.

Surprised as they were, the Americans fought with desperate courage, but the battle was over when Washington reached the

scene and only darkness saved the army, which had been driven back on its last intrenchments at Brooklyn Heights. Indeed, with a superior force confronting it and a wide river behind it, capture or annihilation seemed certain, but Washington was not ready to accept either alternative. Without the loss of a moment, he dispatched couriers to seize every boat, barge and scow which could be located on the river front and hurry them to the rescue. Then, assembling his officers, he explained his plan, which was to be kept secret from the men. As soon as

the nondescript fleet arrived the officers were to move their troops so as to create the idea that they were being formed for a night attack, and then quickly wheel them about and march them aboard the vessels. Meanwhile the companies nearest the British were to remain in position, noisily throwing up new intrenchments. Of course, if this maneuver was discovered all would be lost, for the troops would be powerless to defend themselves. But desperate ills demand desperate remedies, and measures were at once taken to carry out the perilous orders.

Again and again during the eventful hours that followed disaster seemed inevitable. Once a cannon was accidentally discharged while being moved to the shore and once the rear-guard, left to deceive the enemy with a pretence of digging intrenchments, mistaking its orders, abandoned its position, and it seemed almost certain that the British sentinels would discover the deserted lines. Fortunately, however, they remained in ignorance of this fact and after the whole army was safely afloat Washington himself stepped into a boat and gave the order to

begin the retreat. Even then the fate of the whole expedition trembled in the balance, for the wind died out and the tide began to carry the heavily laden vessels toward the enemy. Finally, however, the breeze freshened in the right direction and under cover of a fog the entire flotilla slipped quietly away. When the sun rose on August 30, 1776, not a man or a gun confronted the British lines.

CHAPTER IX

FIGHTING CHANCES

ASTONISHED and chagrined as General Howe was at the escape of the American army, he soon convinced himself that it had merely slipped out of the frying pan into the fire, for he knew that New York was an island from which Washington and his troops would find it extremely difficult to retreat. Indeed, with Lord Howe's powerful fleet and his own victorious army,

the British commander concluded that he had his opponent fairly trapped and that he need be in no haste to bag the game. During the next two weeks, therefore, no hostile move was made and Admiral Howe received a committee from Congress to whom he offered peace, on the basis of the colonists resubmitting themselves to English rule. But when it became apparent that nothing short of independence would satisfy them the negotiations promptly came to a halt. The campaign was thereupon resumed, with a brisk bombardment of the

Moving to the Attack on Trenton
(December 25, 1776)

American intrenchments to cover a landing of the troops near what is now East Thirty-fourth Street. Had the lines at this point been firmly held it is probable that not a boat would have reached the shore, but the troops on guard were raw recruits who fled almost at the first shot, and when Washington arrived on the scene the advance-guard of the enemy was already on the shore. There was still a chance of retrieving the situation, however, and the General dashed among the frightened troops, imploring them to stand fast, and even striking some

of the skulkers with the flat of his sword in his efforts to check the panic. In fact, he was still endeavoring to rally his men when the British skirmish line bore down upon him, and one of his officers, fearing that he would be captured, finally forced him from the field.

Had Howe pushed this advantage home by extending his line straight across the island he would have prevented General Putnam and at least five thousand men who were at the southern end from joining the main body under Washington who was stationed at the northern end, and

thus divided the American forces so that each part would have been hopelessly outnumbered. But the day was warm and Howe, with his staff, stopped for refreshments at Mrs. Murray's house, near what is now called Murray Hill, where they were so pleasantly received by their hostess and her daughters that they readily accepted an invitation to dinner. Meanwhile Putnam was warned of his peril and, while the American women made themselves agreeable, Major Aaron Burr guided the threatened troops up the further shore past the danger point and

brought them, safe and sound, to Washington at Harlem Heights.

Possibly the loss of this great opportunity nettled the British commander, but in any case he immediately advanced against the American lines with the idea of piercing them at some point and pouring sufficient men through the opening to subject his opponent to a front and rear fire that would compel his prompt surrender. So confident was Howe that he could break the American line that his buglers advanced, blowing the fox-hunter's "gone to ground" call,

whose meaning Washington, as a sportsman, thoroughly understood. But he responded to this mocking intimation that he was as good as caught by a hail of fire which fairly swept the British veterans off their feet and demonstrated the folly of attempting to crash through the thin but rock-like center. There was nothing to be done, therefore, but to order a halt and swing around one end or the other of the American lines, and Howe accordingly retired to his intrenchments pending the arrival of the fleet which would enable him to complete this maneuver.

Washington soon saw what his opponent's next move would be, but whether the attack would be made on the right or the left end he could not be certain, and during the weeks that followed he made every effort to guard himself against surprise. It was at this crisis that he sent Captain Nathan Hale to Long Island with instructions to enter the British lines and learn from what point the attack was to be made, but the gallant young schoolmaster, captured while returning with his information, was hanged as a spy.

Finally the movements of the enemy's ships and men made it clear that Howe was planning a wide flanking movement around the left end, and to meet this maneuver Washington fell back upon White Plains, where, in a fierce encounter (Oct. 28, 1776), he checked the enemy's advance. Here again the British commander missed a great opportunity, for had he pressed forward he could have swung his troops around and behind their quarry, for the Americans were in sorry plight toward the close of the day and the breastworks which they erected dur-

ing the night were merely made of cornstalks, affording little or no shelter. But these frail defences looked formidable in the distance and Howe halted his men, not caring to risk an assault until reinforcements arrived. Meanwhile Washington again slipped away—this time to a really strong position, where his exhausted men were able to secure a well earned rest. Then, just as they were beginning to regain their courage and confidence, Howe suddenly swooped down on Fort Washington, away over on the American right and somewhat

Washington Receiving Colonel Rall's Parole
(December 26, 1776)

to the rear. If Washington's advice had been heeded this post would have been abandoned as soon as his army fell back, but Congress had virtually ordered that it should be held, believing it to be impregnable. Perhaps it might have proved so had not a traitor provided Howe with secret information, telling him when and where to make his attack, with the result that this all-important position, including its garrison of 3,000 men with vast stores of cannon and ammunition, fell into the hands of the British almost without a struggle. This

was a crushing blow to the American cause, for it not only eliminated the flower of the army but seriously impaired the means of keeping what remained of it in the field. Therefore the only safety for Washington lay in immediate flight; and with Lord Cornwallis, the most enterprising of Howe's lieutenants, almost on his heels, the American commander began one of the most famous retreats known to history.

CHAPTER X

ACROSS THE JERSEYS

IT was fortunate that Washington had crossed the Hudson with some of his troops before the disastrous capture of the fortress bearing his name, but even with the lead which this gave him he had barely time to order General Lee, his second in command, to join him with the rest of the army before Cornwallis was in full pursuit. In fact, the British commander moved so rap-

idly that the Americans were forced to leave most of their baggage behind them, and not many miles had been covered before they began to suffer intensely from cold and hunger. Indeed many of them soon dropped from the ranks, and the small army speedily dwindled to three thousand pitifully exhausted men whose flight seemed certain to end in ignominious capture. But their leader realized that the fate of the American cause depended upon his keeping an army in the field, and he dodged and slipped behind river after river, destroying the

bridges by which he crossed, now delaying his pursuers with a brisk rear-guard action and now dividing his forces to throw them off the trail, but always managing to keep just out of reach of the clutching foe. Had General Lee promptly obeyed his superior's orders Cornwallis might have found his own safety imperiled, for the chase had drawn him beyond the reach of speedy reinforcement. But Lee, from selfish and possibly traitorous motives, did not hurry, and by the time the Commander-in-Chief and his freezing troops neared the Dela-

ware River the days of the American Revolution seemed to be numbered. Washington, however, was not yet at the end of his resources, and hurrying forward couriers to seize every boat up and down the river for seventy miles, he moved onward undismayed. Success or failure, of course, depended upon obtaining the means of crossing the river and preventing the enemy from following. But fortunately the boats were ready when the troops reached the shore, and sinking all that were not employed in ferrying his men, Washington had his army beyond the

reach of his opponent's cannon as the vanguard of the British came in sight.

For a time Cornwallis scoured the country to discover the means of transporting his troops, but finding none he determined to wait until the river froze. That event did not then promise to delay him long, for the weather was still bitterly cold and the ice was already forming, so ordering his second in command to continue the pursuit at the earliest possible moment, he returned to New York firmly convinced that he had brought the war to a successful close.

CHAPTER XI

A NIGHT ATTACK

GENERAL HOWE expressly approved of Cornwallis's action and cordially endorsed his opinion that all serious opposition to the authorities of the Crown had been effectually suppressed. This was not the hasty conclusion of an over-confident commander. It was supported by the submission of thousands of disaffected colonists who had hastened to make their

The Battle of Princeton
(January 3, 1777)

peace with the government during the retreat across the Jerseys; it was confirmed by the flight of the Continental Congress from Philadelphia; it was encouraged by the constant desertions from the American camp and the reports which came from that side of the Delaware to the effect that only a small fraction of those who had escaped Cornwallis still remained under arms, and it was officially endorsed by the British government, which congratulated the commanding general on his brilliant campaign and rewarded him with a title.

It was impossible to dispute these facts, and Washington did not attempt it. He looked them straight in the face and made his plans accordingly. If the worst came to pass and the British crossed the Delaware, he had determined to scatter his little band of followers among the mountains and reassemble them later. But no thought of surrender or compromise entered his mind. Indeed from his correspondence at this time one might imagine that he was commanding a formidable army instead of a handful of ragged, half-starved men, for he

made full reports to Congress; conducted negotiations for the exchange of prisoners, and performed the thousand other duties which devolve upon a commander-in-chief, with all the dignity and calmness of a soldier sure of himself and his cause. This was not a mere pose intended to deceive his foes or hearten his friends. It was the natural attitude of a man who felt that he represented a great cause and had determined to uphold it worthily to the end. Meanwhile, he anxiously watched for some opening to stave off the impending ruin, sending

spies in the guise of truck-farmers through the enemy's camps to search for weak spots, and despatching more and more urgent orders to General Charles Lee to bring his troops to Headquarters without an instant's delay. Then came the news that Lee had been captured, while separated from his command, by a squad of British cavalry. This was the first piece of good luck which had befallen Washington in many a weary month, for General Sullivan, who succeeded Lee, swiftly brought his men into camp, marching them more miles in a day

than their former leader had done in a week, and with their advent the American commander began to plan a daring, aggressive movement.

Information received from his spies convinced Washington that the enemy's vigilance was relaxed and that some of their commands on the river were so widely separated that one or more of them might be attacked before the others could come to the rescue. He therefore assembled his chief officers in a secret conference and arranged that two expeditions should cross the river on Christmas night (1776) and make a simul-

taneous attack on different parts of the British lines, while he himself, with the main body of troops, fell upon the Hessians stationed at Trenton, whose isolated position bade fair to render them an easy prey. To insure concerted action all the officers set their watches by Washington's, and before nightfall the three divisions of the little army started for their respective stations. In one respect the moment chosen for this move was most favorable, for the river was almost blocked with loose ice and a wild storm of sleet and snow was

raging, rendering the enemy confident that no one would venture to cross the water. This confidence was not misplaced as far as two of the three commands were concerned, for Washington's men alone succeeded in forcing their way through the perilous ice floes. The only chance of success then lay in effecting a complete surprise, for the failure of the other two expeditions left the neighboring posts free to go to the Hessians' assistance at the first warning. Washington therefore pushed ahead at a rapid pace, his men wrapping their guns

in blankets to keep them dry, and the officers wearing bits of white paper pinned to their hats to make sure that the troops would recognize them in the darkness. But silently and swiftly as they moved under cover of the storm, their landing and march became known to at least one royalist, who hurried to warn Colonel Rall, the Hessian commander, of the impending danger. That officer, however, was in no mood to have his Christmas festivities spoiled by the intrusion of strangers. He therefore declined to see the excited messenger, and

Valley Forge
(1777-8)

when the man sent in a note informing him that the Americans were coming, he thrust the letter, unopened, into his pocket. Thus the vanguard of Washington's force reached the outskirts of Trenton unheralded, and the fire of the fleeing sentinels first warned the sleeping garrison of its danger. It was too late then for any formidable resistance, and after a few volleys had been exchanged, during which Colonel Rall fell mortally wounded, his men threw down their arms. Only pausing long enough to visit the bedside of the unfortunate Hessian

commander and receive his parole, Washington gathered up the spoil of battle, which included six cannon, a thousand muskets, forty horses, fifteen standards, thirty officers and nearly a thousand men, and quickly recrossing the Delaware, reached his headquarters with a total loss of three men, all of whom were frozen to death on the return journey.

CHAPTER XII

A BOLD MANEUVER

THE fires of revolution, which seemed to have been stamped out during the early part of December, 1776, burst into menacing flames before the New Year dawned. Bells were rung in all the rebel towns; recruits came flocking to the army; Congress voted Washington almost dictatorial powers and the startled British generals hurried from their comfortable winter quarters in New

York to scatter the rekindled embers of rebellion. Lord Cornwallis was on the point of sailing for England when the news from Trenton reached him, but he sprang into the saddle, and leading a picked corps, raced to the scene of action with really astonishing speed. Indeed he covered the distance between New York and Princeton so rapidly that Washington, who had again recrossed the river to Trenton, had no time to retreat, and only just managed to get behind the Assanpink Creek, which flows past the town, before his active opponent confronted him with an

overwhelming force. A hot artillery fire, however, prevented the immediate passage of the Assanpink, and before this could be forced night brought the struggle to a close.

On two former occasions darkness had saved the Americans from annihilation or capture, and it again protected them, although this time all the avenues of escape seemed blocked. But Washington, with his back to the wall, confronting a wide circle of foes, thought quickly and acted with consummate daring. Believing that all Cornwallis's troops

had not yet reached the scene and that a considerable rear-guard must be somewhere on the road behind him guarding the baggage train, the American commander determined to withdraw his whole army, and swinging around Cornwallis's front attempt to crush his rear-guard and make for the mountains and safety. Secrecy was again essential for success, and so rapidly and quietly was the word passed that some of the officers quartered at a distance from the main camp were not notified of the sudden plan and awoke to find their friends gone. Meanwhile the

The Battle of Monmouth
(June 28, 1778)

army was swiftly making its wide turning movement, with cannon wheels muffled in blankets and every precaution taken to insure silence and speed. Indeed so hot was the pace that Princeton was reached almost at daybreak (January 3, 1777), and when the British forces, moving from that point to reinforce Cornwallis, stumbled upon the vanguard of the American army, they at first believed that they had merely encountered a scouting party which could be easily brushed aside. When the error was discovered, however, it was too late to correct it and

Washington's troops swept through the surprised British columns with resistless fury, sending part of them scurrying toward Trenton and driving the others back on Princeton, where practically all of them were killed or captured.

Then without the loss of a moment the daring strategist turned his victorious forces into the road leading to New Brunswick, where he had learned Cornwallis's baggage trains were parked, with the idea of capturing them before they could be protected. But finding his nimble-footed antagonist was hotly

pursuing him, he abandoned the effort to secure this prize, and slipping to the Basking Ridge Hills, near Morristown, was soon in a position which defied attack.

CHAPTER XIII

THE FIGHT FOR THE HUDSON

IF Howe had succeeded in capturing or destroying Washington's little army, the rest of the Continental forces would probably have melted away and the war would have ended then and there. But the moment the Commander-in-Chief was safely intrenched at Morristown various small detachments began to press forward and harass the British, with the result that

Howe, finding it more and more dangerous to be separated from his base of supplies, gradually fell back toward New York and virtually abandoned the Jerseys altogether.

Though Washington had thus saved the cause by keeping his army in the field, he soon found that he would have to exert all his energies if even a semblance of government or effective organization of any sort was to be maintained. He accordingly postponed his military plans for the moment, and relying on the vast powers with which Congress had entrusted him, devoted all his

attention to providing the means by which the war could be continued with some hope of success; mortgaging or selling his own property to help equip and pay the troops; reconciling the quarrels between the various colonies; advising with Congress; adjusting difficulties among his officers; persuading leading citizens to support the government, and generally performing an amount of work which would be incredible were it not that it is all set forth in the great mass of letters and orders which he wrote during this period, and which are now in-

cluded in the published volumes of his correspondence.

Meanwhile, General Howe had been studying his maps to some purpose, for he had discovered that the Hudson River fairly divided the rebellious colonies. Therefore if he could control this waterway no American troops from the South would be able to cross into New England to help their brother rebels, nor could New England aid the Southern colonies, and he would be free to concentrate all his forces upon each section in turn. He accordingly determined that the possession

of the Hudson should be the main object of his next campaign. To further this General Burgoyne was ordered to begin the conquest from Canada, working southward until he should be joined by Howe moving northward from New York. This plan was sound enough, but Washington found difficulty in comprehending his opponent's preliminary moves, for the British authorities in London, unfamiliar with the ground and generally ignorant of the whole military situation, made sorry work of Sir William's strategy. Therefore,

while Washington held his army, which then numbered about 11,000 men, ready to block Howe's path whenever he should start to form the junction with Burgoyne, the London strategists hemmed and hawed and generally hesitated to give their military representative a free hand, with the result that he did nothing but maneuver his troops in the hope of tempting Washington into a general engagement, or luring him away from the Hudson. But his experienced adversary was far too wary to be caught by such wiles, and though he marched and

counter-marched his troops to meet whatever move was indicated by the enemy, he never allowed himself to be drawn very far from the river, whose possession he recognized was the object of his opponent's campaign. Great was his astonishment, then, when the news reached him that Howe had embarked his army on transports and was apparently bound for Philadelphia. Indeed for a time he believed this to be nothing but a trick intended to entice him away from the real point of attack. But when, at the end of August, 1777, the British fleet actu-

Molly Pitcher at Monmouth
(June 28, 1778)

ally appeared near the Head of Elk in Chesapeake Bay he hastily broke camp and started for Philadelphia, determined to take full advantage of a situation which seemed almost too good to be true. For a time he still acted with great caution, fearing that Howe would perceive the folly of leaving Burgoyne to fight his way down the Hudson through a wilderness which was already beginning to teem with foes. Indeed it was not until Sir William actually landed his superbly equipped army of 17,000 men and started north toward Philadelphia that he allowed his own

plans to take definite shape. No one but a wholly unselfish man, ready at all times to sacrifice himself for his cause, would have dreamed of adopting the policy upon which Washington then decided. Had he been concerned for his personal success or reputation all he had to do was to order reinforcements from the northern army and confront Howe on even terms or with superior numbers. Nothing of this sort, however, crossed his mind. On the contrary, he determined not to draw a man from the Hudson River net into which Burgoyne was

slowly forcing his way, and to keep Howe so busily employed in Pennsylvania that he would have no time to go to the assistance of his brother officer. In doing this Washington was well aware that he deliberately courted defeat at the hands of an adversary whose force was vastly superior to his own in equipment, discipline and numbers, but he likewise knew that each day's delay was a victory for his cause. He was therefore well satisfied to be defeated every day in the week if only he could compel the enemy to stay and fight hard for an empty prize.

It was in this spirit and with this settled policy that the Continental army was drawn up behind the Brandywine Creek for the defense of Philadelphia on the 11th of September, 1777. A rapid and well concealed flank movement by Howe and Cornwallis surprised General Sullivan commanding the right wing of the American forces and almost resulted in stampeding the whole army, but Washington reached the scene in time to avert a panic and finally succeeded in beating an orderly retreat. Then he began a series of maneuvers which threatened and

checked his victorious opponent so successfully that the British army consumed two weeks in covering twenty-six miles, and when it at last reached Philadelphia, Burgoyne was almost beyond hope of rescue.

Almost, but not quite. There was still a chance that the War Minister in London might wake to the situation and authorize Howe to save the imperiled army on the Hudson, or that Howe himself might take the matter into his own hands. To prevent this Washington decided to make his opponent look to his own safety, and starting

out from the American headquarters at Pottsgrove, thirty-five miles from Philadelphia, on October 3, 1777, he made a rapid march to Germantown, where he completely surprised the British force and for a time hurled it back with heavy loss. Indeed, had it not been for the confusion caused by a fog and a stubborn resistance by the 40th Regiment under Colonel Musgrove, it is doubtful if the reinforcements which were hurried from Philadelphia would have reached the scene in time to prevent a signal disaster to the British arms. But though Howe saved

the day and eventually compelled his assailants to retreat, he received a bad scare, and whatever plans he may have been devising for Burgoyne's rescue were promptly laid aside. Probably it was then too late, in any case, to have saved the northern army, for in less than two weeks Burgoyne surrendered to General Gates at Saratoga, and after forcing Howe to fight all autumn for the complete possession of Philadelphia, Washington practically locked his opponent up in the captured city and went into winter quarters at Valley Forge.

CHAPTER XIV

VALLEY FORGE

VALLEY FORGE, which took its name from an iron works in the immediate neighborhood, was admirably located for Washington's purposes, not only because it was impregnable to attack but also because it was so situated as to menace both Philadelphia and New York. Indeed it was so close to the Quaker City that Howe soon found himself practically besieged in the captured

The First Gun at Yorktown
(September 28-9, 1781)

capital, and General Clinton could not leave New York without completely exposing it to Washington's ragged followers in the Pennsylvania valley. That the little American army was ill-clad and half-starved could not be denied, but the worst aspect of its pitiable condition was that there would have been no lack of provisions and clothing had those who were charged with the duty of furnishing the necessary supplies performed their work with even ordinary intelligence, industry and honesty. Congress had, however, fallen into the hands of a set of in-

competents who had taken the places of abler and more patriotic men who had resigned to enter the army or to perform other and more congenial public service. The result was that in a winter of exceptional severity the soldiers at Valley Forge were not only left to freeze and starve, but were actually denounced as being too lazy or cowardly to fight. Washington met this neglect and calumny with characteristic energy. Since Congress would not provide for his men he determined to do it himself, and urging General Greene, one of his ablest lieutenants,—to disprove

the saying that "history never heard of a Quartermaster-General"—he at last persuaded that officer to assume the task of provisioning and equipping the army. There is nothing very romantic or exciting in a Quartermaster's duties under the most favorable circumstances, and Greene's work was as difficult as it was disagreeable, for there was very little money to buy food for the hungry soldiers, and obtaining it by force aroused the enmity of all the countryside. In the face of these and many other obstacles it would not have been surprising if

Greene had failed. But he did not fail, and for once at least a Quartermaster-General made history.

Meanwhile, Washington was bringing his experience as a planter into play by planning for a permanent camp on the lines of a well-ordered village, awarding prizes to the men who built the best huts, and otherwise encouraging them to their best efforts. Thus, little by little, he inspired the soldiers with something of his own resistless spirit and gradually made the encampment habitable if not comfortable. But in spite of all his exertions, the men

suffered intensely from the cold and privations to which they were subjected, diseases of various kinds ravaged their ranks and many a poor fellow died a martyr to official indifference and neglect. Yet such was the devotion of the Valley Forge garrison to their chief that there were practically no desertions among the native born Americans and very few of the foreign born sought this refuge from the hardships they were needlessly forced to endure. Similar loyalty to the great cause and its unselfish leader was not, however, observable in other and more com-

fortable headquarters. In fact, it soon became obvious that General Gates, to whom Burgoyne had surrendered at Saratoga, was encouraging an attempt to supplant Washington as the Commander-in-Chief. For a time no notice was taken of this petty conspiracy, which was engineered by an ambitious Irish adventurer named Conway, until certain members of Congress began to shake their heads at Washington's defeats and compare them with Gates's reputed triumph. As a matter of fact, it was General Schuyler and General Benedict Arnold who

had done all the work in the Saratoga campaign, and Gates had arrived on the scene only just about in time to gain the official credit for the victory. Nevertheless there was considerable evidence that Congress was being deceived by these constant misrepresentations, when the publication of some letters which Conway and Gates imprudently wrote revealed the whole miserable plot, and its exposure was soon followed by a public outburst of affection and loyalty for Washington such as he had never previously experienced.

Meanwhile, recruiting had been

steadily progressing in Valley Forge, and to train the newcomers and the veterans in the tactics of European armies there had come to Washington's assistance the most famous drill-master known to history. This was no less a personage than Baron Steuben, a former member of Frederick the Great's staff, who, like Lafayette, had come to America, volunteering to serve without pay or reward of any kind, because of his belief in the principles for which the colonies were contending. Under the guidance of this distinguished instructor the discipline and effici-

Americans Carrying Redoubt at Yorktown
(October 14, 1781)

ency of the troops were vastly improved, and the formation of a cavalry corps under "Light Horse" Harry Lee rendered the army, which, by the spring of 1778, numbered almost 15,000 men, still more formidable. Then news reached Valley Forge that France had officially recognized the independence of the colonies, and the encouragement which this brought to the supporters of the American cause was not lost upon General Howe, whose possession of Philadelphia had by that time become so precarious that his foraging parties did not dare to

venture from the city unless protected by a full brigade. Indeed the British general's military reputation had been greatly damaged by his winter in Philadelphia and there was more regret than surprise when he retired to England, turning over his command to General Clinton, then quartered at New York.

The acceptance of his resignation was a most unjust reflection on Howe's generalship, but he probably welcomed it as relieving him from a most unpleasant duty. He had never had any real sympathy with the war against the Americans and

his campaigns had been fatally handicapped by the stupidity and neglect of the home government, whose policy had veered between conciliation and vengeance by fits and starts. Howe had certainly tried to conquer the people of Philadelphia by kindness during his enforced residence in that city, and shortly before his departure the authorities in London made one of their spasmodic efforts at a general reconciliation by appointing Peace Commissioners to confer with the representatives in Congress. For a time Sir Henry Clinton thought

that this might render further hostilities unnecessary. His hope, however, was soon rudely shattered, and realizing the danger of remaining longer in Philadelphia, he abandoned the city on June 18, 1778, and began a rapid retreat to New York, hotly pursued by Washington's exulting army.

CHAPTER XV

THE BATTLE OF MONMOUTH

THE country through which Clinton and Cornwallis were retreating northward in stifling heat was practically the same as that over which Cornwallis had driven Washington's half-frozen followers southward just a year and a half earlier. In each case the pursuer had a great opportunity for ending the war, but when the Americans were retreating they were unencumbered with bag-

gage while the British fugitives were hampered with a wagon train nearly twelve miles long. There was every probability, therefore, that they would soon be overhauled, and with a force equal if not superior to his adversary's, Washington knew that all the chances of war were in his favor. Certainly no such opportunity had ever previously been offered to him for striking a crippling blow, and his astonishment was therefore unspeakable when General Charles Lee, who was practically his chief of staff, strongly urged that the pursuit be abandoned and that

the enemy be allowed to depart in peace. Preposterous as this advice appeared to be, Lee's military reputation was such that a number of other officers supported him, but Washington, who had forgiven, if not quite forgotten his suspiciously bad judgment in handling his reinforcements on the retreat to the Delaware, promptly disregarded his opinion and ordered a vigorous pursuit. Lee took offense at this rebuff and declined to lead the advance-guard to which he was assigned, until Washington appointed Lafayette to the position when

he repented and asked for reinstatement. Such conduct in the presence of the enemy was, of course, unpardonable, and it would have been well if Washington had refused to listen to his plea. But the army as a whole had confidence in the offending officer and his chief had no means of knowing that the man was a traitor who had already supplied the British with a plan for attacking the army whose uniform he wore. Lafayette was accordingly asked to yield his command to Lee, who was hurried forward with strict injunctions to attack and force the fighting

French Carrying Redoubt at Yorktown
(October 14, 1781)

until the main American column should reach the scene.

A more favorable moment for the execution of these orders could not have been selected, for Clinton had divided his forces, sending part of them forward with the heavy baggage trains and holding the rest in reserve to cover the retreat. Cornwallis, who commanded this rear-guard, concluded that the best way to fulfill his orders was to attack the advancing American columns, and a firm stand or counter attack on the part of Lee would have soon brought the divided British army into colli-

sion with a greatly superior force, which was the very situation upon which Washington was counting. But to the amazement of Lafayette and his fellow officers Lee did not hold his ground and allowed the troops to retreat in such fashion as to expose them to destruction or capture. Indeed both officers and men were becoming badly demoralized when Washington arrived on the scene, and bursting into a violent rage, ordered Lee to the rear. Then with desperate energy he set about rallying the confused and huddled columns, assigning them to posi-

tions favorable for both defense and attack.

On several other occasions during the war the American commander had endeavored to extricate his troops from a perilous situation by throwing himself into the thick of the fray and inspiring them with his own example and daring, but never before had he met with such instant response. Thanks to Baron Steuben's tireless drilling at Valley Forge, the men quickly reformed their disordered ranks, and after checking the advancing British grenadiers, rolled them back with fearful

slaughter. Indeed, such was the enthusiasm displayed in this memorable battle that when one of the American artillerymen fell, his wife, known as Molly Pitcher, is said to have taken his place and served his gun during the remainder of the engagement.

It was then, of course, too late for Washington to carry out his original plan of battle. Nevertheless, before night all the lost ground had been recovered and such heavy damage had been inflicted upon Clinton's forces that he was glad to escape under cover of darkness (June 28,

1778). This timely and skilful withdrawal probably saved his army from destruction and prolonged the war for at least another three years.

CHAPTER XVI

TREACHERY

THERE was nothing to be gained by further pursuit, so Washington moved forward by slow stages, and reaching White Plains, some twenty miles from New York, went into camp. For a time he hoped to arrange with the French fleet, which had appeared in the outer harbor, for a joint attack on the city, but it was impossible to induce the new allies of the colonies

to coöperate effectively, and he had to content himself by holding Clinton within the city lines. Indeed from a military standpoint this was all he attempted for nearly a year, though his activities in other directions multiplied as they had done at Valley Forge. In fact, the situation soon became far worse than it had been during the preceding year, for Congress not only left undone those things which it ought to have done, but did many things which it ought not to have done, with dire results to the country and the cause it was supposed to pro-

tect. In the first place, despite Washington's protest, it appointed the self-seeking Gates to defend the South against the army which Clinton had despatched to harass that region; and, in the second place, it unjustly accused Benedict Arnold of improper conduct as an officer, denied him a prompt hearing of the charges brought against him, and after he had been exonerated from all blame, abused and persecuted him almost beyond endurance. Washington was powerless to prevent these foolish and dangerous proceedings, but

Surrender of Cornwallis
(October 19, 1781)

when Gates was shamefully routed at Camden, where he displayed such concern for his person that he was the first to arrive at a point of safety, the nomination of his successor was entrusted to the Commander-in-Chief. He promptly appointed Nathanael Greene, the Quartermaster-General of Valley Forge, who straightway set about winning new laurels for himself in a field where the Americans had, up to that time, known only disastrous defeats. Meanwhile, certain members of Congress had been continuing their mischievous work

with Arnold, and when that officer asked Washington to transfer him from Philadelphia where his enemies were goading him to madness, his chief gladly acceded to the request, assigning him to the command of West Point. As a matter of fact, it was a great relief to Washington to have a man of Arnold's ability in charge of this fortress, which was the key to the American position on the Hudson River and virtually controlled that important waterway. For want of just such a subordinate he had been forced to undertake this duty himself, not daring to be absent

more than a few hours at a time, despite the fact that his presence was urgently needed elsewhere. But with Arnold on the ground he felt at liberty to turn his attention to other matters, and accordingly at the first favorable moment he started for Hartford to confer with Rochambeau, the commander of the French forces in America, concerning a joint campaign against New York.

This was exactly what Arnold had hoped would happen, for all his loyalty to his country had been turned into hate by his persecutions and he had long been meditating a

terrible revenge. Indeed he had already sent word to Sir Henry Clinton that he was prepared to betray West Point in return for a high commission in the English army and a large sum of money. Such a proposition was, of course, a downright insult to every officer who wore a British uniform and that it should have been considered, even for a moment, demonstrated the pitiful weakness of the royal government. The infamous offer, however, was not only considered, but cordially encouraged, and before Arnold actually controlled West Point he had received virtual

assurances that he could buy a commission in the King's service at the loathsome price he mentioned.

Therefore the instant Washington's back was turned the traitor advised his new friends that the time for action had arrived, and Major André, Clinton's Adjutant-General, was despatched to meet him just outside the American lines to devise a plan for carrying out the shameful bargain. This business, which should have disgusted a man of André's standing, was soon transacted, though not soon enough for the British officer, who, to avoid de-

lay, entered the American lines, and foolishly adopting a partial disguise, endeavored to make his way down the left bank of the Hudson. But near Tarrytown he was halted by a group of soldiers and marched to the nearest military post, whose commanding officer, recognizing Arnold's handwriting on the papers which were found in the prisoner's stockings, gave directions to have him conducted to the West Point headquarters. Had these orders remained in force, the plot might not have been discovered in time. But fortunately Major Tallmadge,

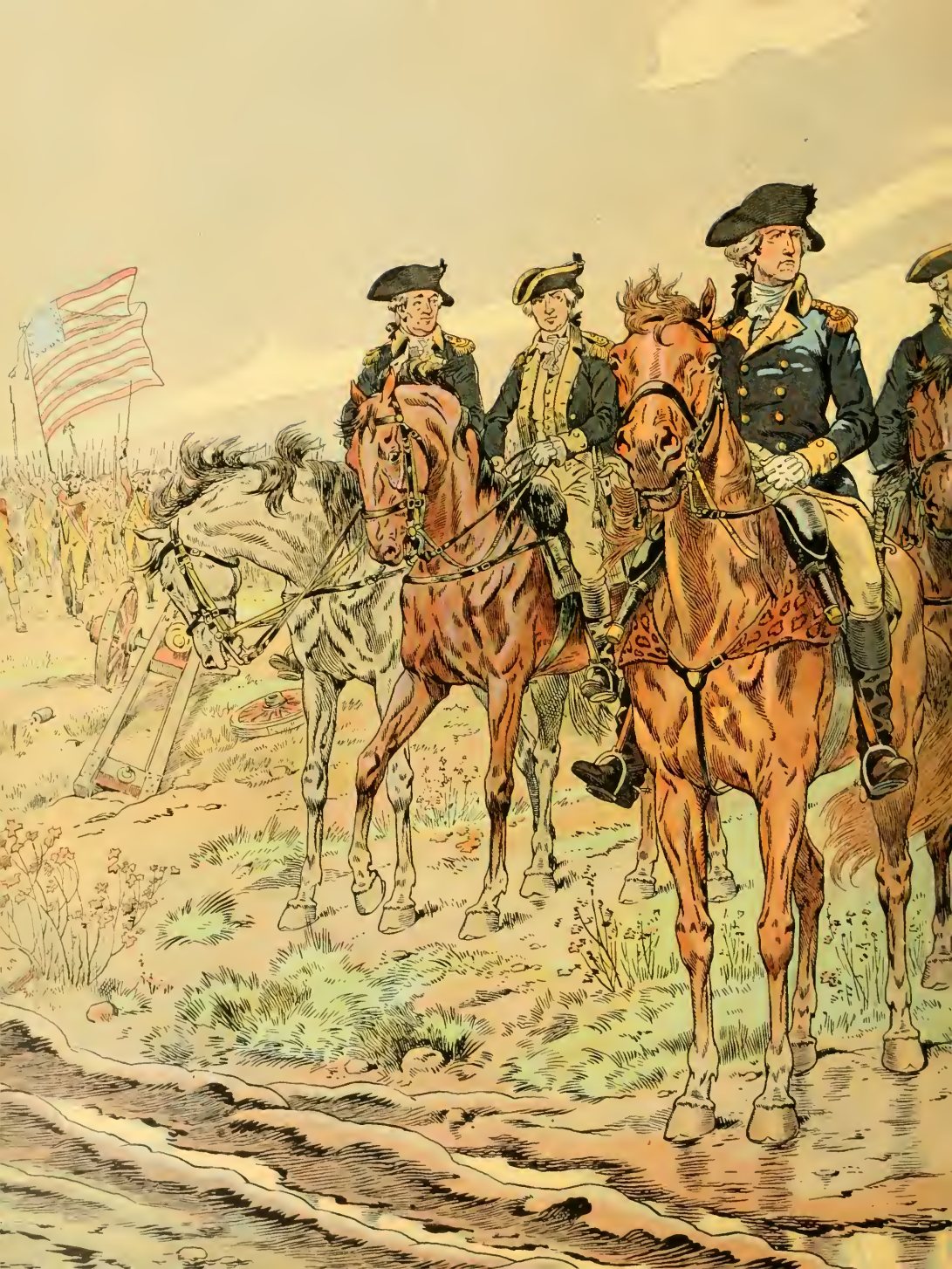
who, strangely enough, had been a classmate of Nathan Hale's at Yale, interposed, and André was held while word of his capture was sent to both Washington and Arnold. The messenger despatched to Washington passed him while he was returning by a different road, and by the time this mischance was corrected, Arnold had learned of the spy's arrest and had taken refuge on a British man-of-war.

CHAPTER XVII

YORKTOWN

ARNOLD'S treacherous desertion was a terrible blow to Washington. He was a man who did not give his friendship lightly, but when once he trusted any one he did so unreservedly, and of all his officers Arnold was perhaps the one upon whose skill and devotion he had most confidently relied. It would not have been surprising, therefore, if the base betrayal of his

Washington and His Principal Generals



friend had hopelessly embittered and discouraged him, but he laid aside his personal feelings, and taking instant measures to protect the threatened fortress, calmly continued his interrupted plans. Indeed it is said that from that day forward he discouraged even the mention of Arnold's name in his presence and it is certain that the most painful act of his official life was his approval of the verdict by which the gallant young Major André was condemned to death.

Then the old struggle to spur Congress into the performance of its

duties was renewed, for no effective coöperation with the French could be had unless the army was in proper condition, and through official mismanagement the troops were not only poorly supplied with arms and ammunition, but their pay was constantly in arrears. Indeed their condition was such that some of the regiments actually mutinied and, had Washington not handled the situation with a strong hand, their example might have had a fatal effect upon the whole army. Cheering news, however, soon came from the South, where Greene had conducted his

campaign so skilfully that Cornwallis had been forced from the Carolinas and had fallen back on Virginia, upon which he intended to inflict summary punishment. The American forces sent to oppose him in that region were under the able leadership of Lafayette, Steuben and Wayne. They were, however, greatly outnumbered, and late in the spring of 1781 Washington realized that if something were not done to relieve them they would soon be captured or destroyed. He accordingly urged General Rochambeau to lose no time in joining him in an attack on New

York which would, at least, hurry the British away from the South and save the situation there. But this or any other effective plan required the coöperation of the French fleet under the Count de Grasse which was then in the West Indies, and Washington persuaded Rochambeau to join him in requesting the French Admiral, either to blockade New York or to set sail for Virginia.

Weeks of anxious waiting followed, during which Rochambeau moved his troops from Newport, Rhode Island, to Dobbs Ferry, New York, where they formed a junction

with Washington's army, and about the 22nd of July, 1781, the allies made a reconnoissance in force against the outlying British defences. This was intended to alarm Clinton and it was entirely successful in that particular, for all his attention was thenceforth focussed on preparations for defending himself from the main assault, of which he judged this to be the preliminary skirmish.

Possibly his expectations might have been fully realized had it not been for the timely arrival of a despatch from de Grasse notifying Washington that his fleet was sailing

for Chesapeake Bay. Then, almost at the same moment, came a message from Lafayette to the effect that Cornwallis was at Yorktown on the York River, Virginia, close to the very point for which de Grasse was heading. The instant this situation was realized Washington determined on a bold, swift move which involved great risks but which, if successful, might end the war. He accordingly held a secret conference with Rochambeau, and within a few hours the two armies were on the move through New Jersey. Neither the men nor their officers had any

knowledge of where they were marching or for what purpose, but many of them doubtless thought that New York was the point of attack. Certainly Clinton believed that the Americans were attempting to swing around his rear through Staten Island or Sandy Hook, and every means was taken to encourage this delusion; so that the advance-guard of Washington's hurrying columns had already reached the Delaware River before he awoke to the real peril of the situation. It was then too late to think of pursuit; so Arnold was ordered to

ravage some of the New England towns in the hope of bringing Washington back to their rescue. But the American Commander-in-Chief was not to be swerved from the great object he had in view, and brushing every obstacle aside, he swept down upon Yorktown, arriving there on September 28, 1781.

Meanwhile, the British and French fleets had been battling for the possession of Chesapeake Bay, with the result that the French vessels held command of the disputed waters and Cornwallis was cut off from all escape by sea, with little or no chance

Washington Pleading with Mutinous Soldiers
(1782)

of fighting his way to safety through the ring of steel which was rapidly being welded around him on the land. Nevertheless, he pluckily prepared himself for a stout resistance, and at the end of a two weeks' siege it seemed as though he might be able to hold his ground until the French fleet was called from the scene. This was by no means a remote contingency, for de Grasse soon notified Washington that if the end was much further delayed he would not keep his vessels in position, and to expedite matters the Commander-in-Chief ordered

a combined assault on the British works, Alexander Hamilton leading the American detachments and Colonel de Deuxponts the French. The movement was brilliantly executed, and in less than ten minutes the Americans were swarming over the redoubts against which they had been hurled, and the French soon achieved a similar success. Then followed an heroic attempt by Cornwallis's men to break through the investing lines, which was fiercely repulsed, and a savage bombardment at close range was rapidly reducing the town to bricks and mortar when,

on October 17, 1781, the long roll of a drum was heard from the battered ramparts and a white flag announced that the garrison of 8,000 men were ready to surrender.

Two days later the British marched out of their entrenchments, passing between the French and American armies, and laid down their arms. Lord Cornwallis, however, was spared the humiliation of tendering his sword in person to Washington. Pleading illness, he sent his representative, General O'Hara, to make the formal submission for him, but the American commander deputed

General Lincoln, who had once surrendered to Cornwallis, to receive the sword of his former conqueror, and Lincoln merely taking the blade in his hand for a moment, returned it to the bearer.

CHAPTER XVIII

PEACE

THE surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown virtually ended the war, for within six months after that event negotiations for peace were begun by the British authorities. These negotiations, however, consumed almost a year, and meanwhile Washington experienced great difficulty in keeping the army together, for the soldiers began to suspect that Congress intended to

overlook their claims, and the murmurings against official neglect took a very ugly form. It was not only the men in the ranks who complained of injustice, but also the officers, and this soon brought about a crisis which threatened the very existence of the government. One of the leaders finally addressed a letter to Washington, plainly stating that the army was disgusted with Congress and was ready to abolish that body and install the Commander-in-Chief as supreme ruler, with the title of King.

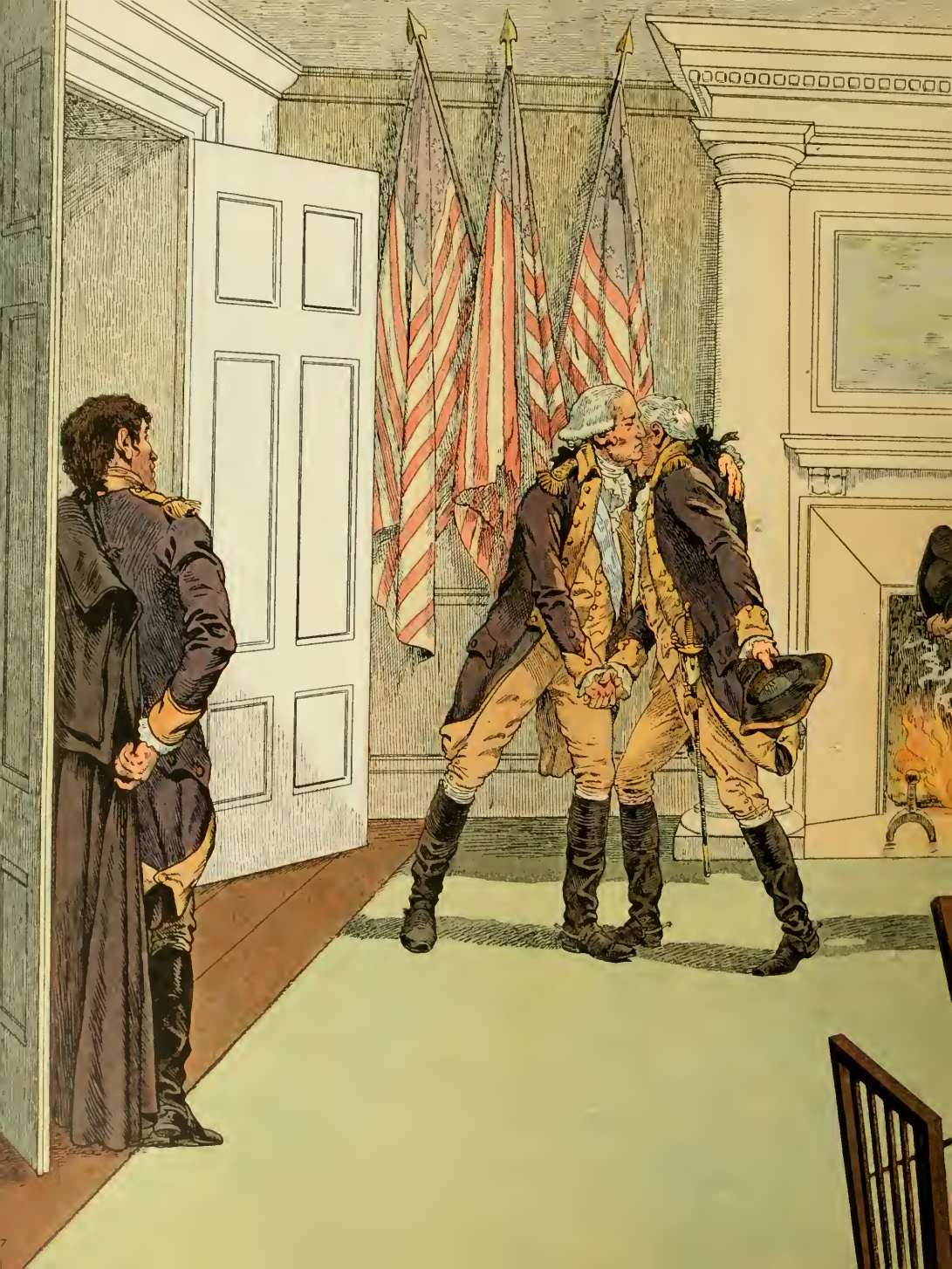
Washington was profoundly as-

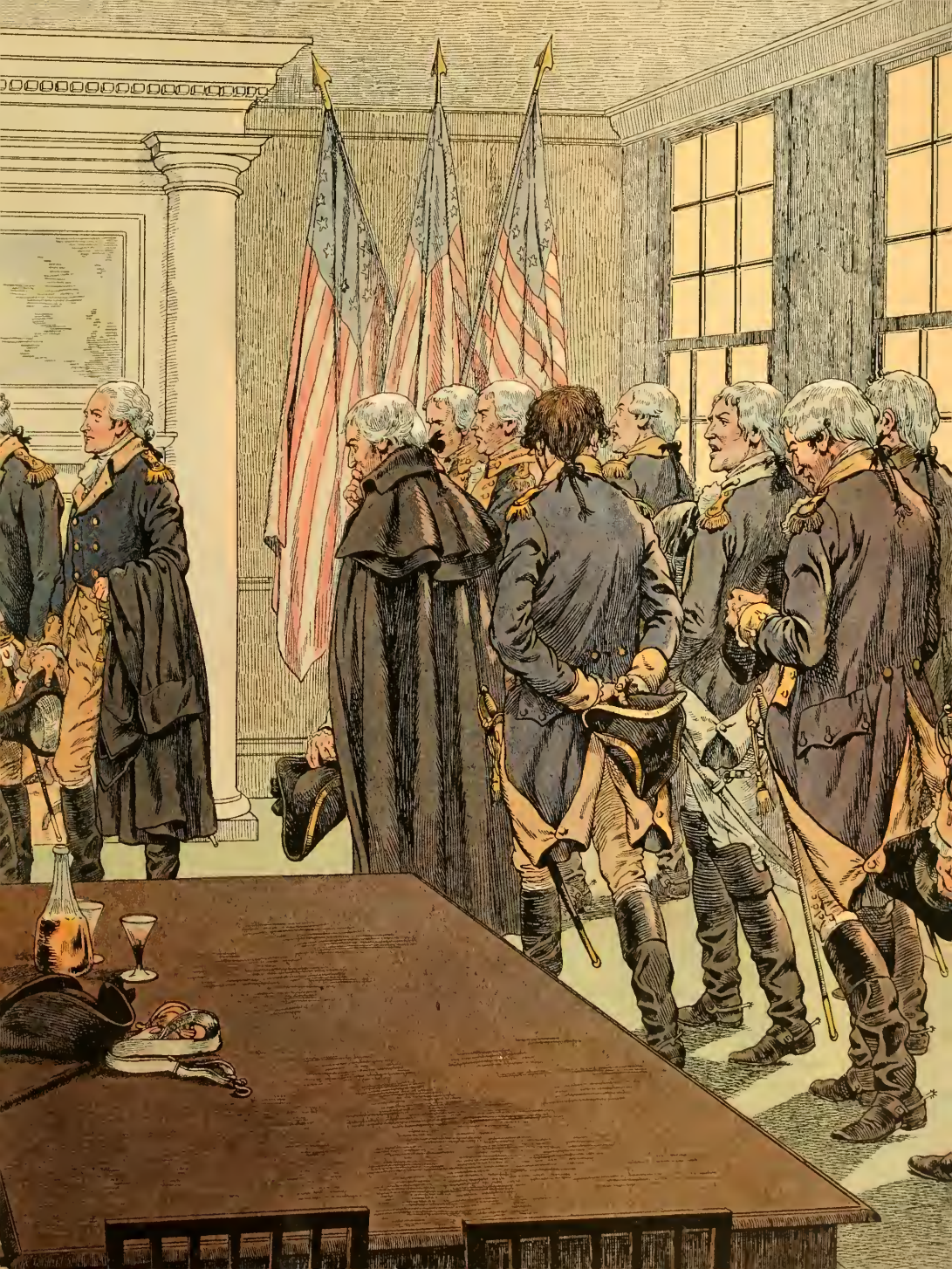
tonished and greatly displeased by this suggestion, which he immediately informed the writer was "big with the greatest mischiefs" which could befall the country. He was at a loss, he said, to conceive what part of his conduct could have given encouragement to any such ideas and begged his correspondent never to communicate as from himself or anyone else sentiments of a similar nature.

This significant rebuke disposed of all plans for turning the United States into a monarchy with Washington as King, but it did not quiet the

spirit of revolt in the army. On the contrary, a meeting was called by the leading officers to devise some practical means of forcing Congress to recognize their rights. What the result of this conference would have been if Washington had not interfered cannot be definitely stated, but it is almost certain that the government would have been completely overthrown. The Commander-in-Chief, however, made a personal appeal to those who had organized the movement, and reminding them that he had grown gray in their service, begged them

Washington's Farewell to His Officers
(December 4, 1783)





to have patience and trust Congress to see that they were treated with justice. Fortunately for the country, the officers listened to this address and agreed out of respect for their beloved chief to postpone the adjustment of their grievances. This, which was, perhaps, the greatest triumph of Washington's career, was achieved only just in the nick of time, for a treaty of peace had already been signed, and on April 19, 1783, exactly eight years after the battle of Lexington, the news was officially proclaimed to the army.

Seven months later the British forces evacuated New York, and Washington having moved down from West Point took possession of the city amid scenes of wild enthusiasm. By this time the army had been practically disbanded, and nine days after his triumphal entry into New York the Commander-in-Chief met his officers in the "Long Room" at Fraunces' Tavern to bid them farewell before starting for Annapolis to tender his resignation to Congress. The moment was a hard one for both the leader and his trusted followers. They had fought shoul-

der to shoulder for many years and the thought that they were parting, never perhaps to meet again, filled them with keen sorrow which they made no effort to conceal. Little was said by anyone, and when Washington, mastering his emotion, thanked them, in a few words, for their devotion and loyalty and asked each of them to take him by the hand, there were many who shed tears.

At Philadelphia Washington stopped to settle his accounts with the government. This was a simple matter, for he had kept full accounts

of all he had spent and every detail was found to be correct. He neither claimed nor received, however, the sums he had expended from his private funds, and he had very little property except his plantations when he laid aside his sword.

The ceremonies surrounding the resignation of his commission as Commander-in-Chief were extremely simple and dignified. Entering the Hall of Congress, where the twenty representatives of the States sat wearing their hats, as was the custom of that time, he faced the audience, and congratulating them on

the termination of the war and commending his officers and men to their favor, resigned "with satisfaction the appointment he had accepted with diffidence."

A brief response was made by the presiding official, at the conclusion of whose remarks Washington rose and passed down the center aisle between the members of Congress, who this time bared their heads.

CHAPTER XIX

HOME DAYS

THE next five and a half years were probably the happiest that Washington ever knew. Surrounded by his family and friends, and amid the scenes of his youth, he devoted himself to the restoration of his beloved Mount Vernon, which had suffered somewhat during the war. It was during this period of peace and joy that he planned and carried out much of the plant-

ing and gardening which to-day delight those who visit this historic home, and the evidences of his presence and care are still to be seen on every side. This labor of love was not performed without interruptions, however, for all sorts and conditions of men journeyed to the Potomac, seeking his advice, and the influx of visitors, drawn there by interest or curiosity, almost turned Mount Vernon, as the host put it, into "a well resorted inn." Even Virginian hospitality must have been sorely taxed in welcoming the strangers within Mount

Vernon's gates, for Washington's diary of June 30, 1785, records that he and his wife dined alone that night for the first time in eighteen months.

Many old friends were, of course, included among the guests at his table, and from the repeated visits of such men as Madison, Monroe, Jefferson, Richard Henry Lee, Patrick Henry, Alexander Hamilton and others, he was kept in close touch with public affairs. It thus happened that when the feeble government was breaking down and the United States was fast becoming

Washington at Mount Vernon
(1798)

disunited, he was in communication with many of those who were seeking to save the country from chaos by urging Congress to call a convention for the purpose of framing a constitution. With voice and pen he earnestly advocated this plan and it is probable that his authority had more weight than that of any other man in persuading the legislators to adopt it. At all events, Virginia promptly nominated him as one of her representatives, and the convention assembled in Philadelphia on May 25, 1787, unanimously chose him for its presiding officer. During

the next four months he was almost constantly occupied with the duties of this office, and his opinion and authority had great weight in effecting the acceptance of the Constitution as framed by the convention by eleven out of the thirteen States.

This event occurred September 17, 1787, and once more restored to the joys of Mount Vernon, Washington proceeded with his task of "building it a little nearer to the heart's desire." He was at this time physically and mentally in his prime, being about fifty-five years of age, full of energy and enthusiasm,

resourceful, experienced and in love with his work. That work was rudely interrupted, however, on March 14, 1789, when Charles Thompson, the veteran Secretary of Congress, arrived at Mount Vernon with the official notification that the master of the house had been elected President of the United States. "My movements to the chair of government," wrote Washington as he was preparing to leave his home, "will be accompanied by feelings not unlike those of a culprit who is going to the place of his execution. So unwilling am I to quit

a peaceful abode for an ocean of difficulties without the competency of political skill, abilities or inclination which are necessary to manage the helm." But this modest self-distrust merely served to increase the people's confidence in their chosen ruler, and his journey from Mount Vernon to New York was a continuous ovation expressing the affection and esteem of the entire nation.

CHAPTER XX

THE PRESIDENCY

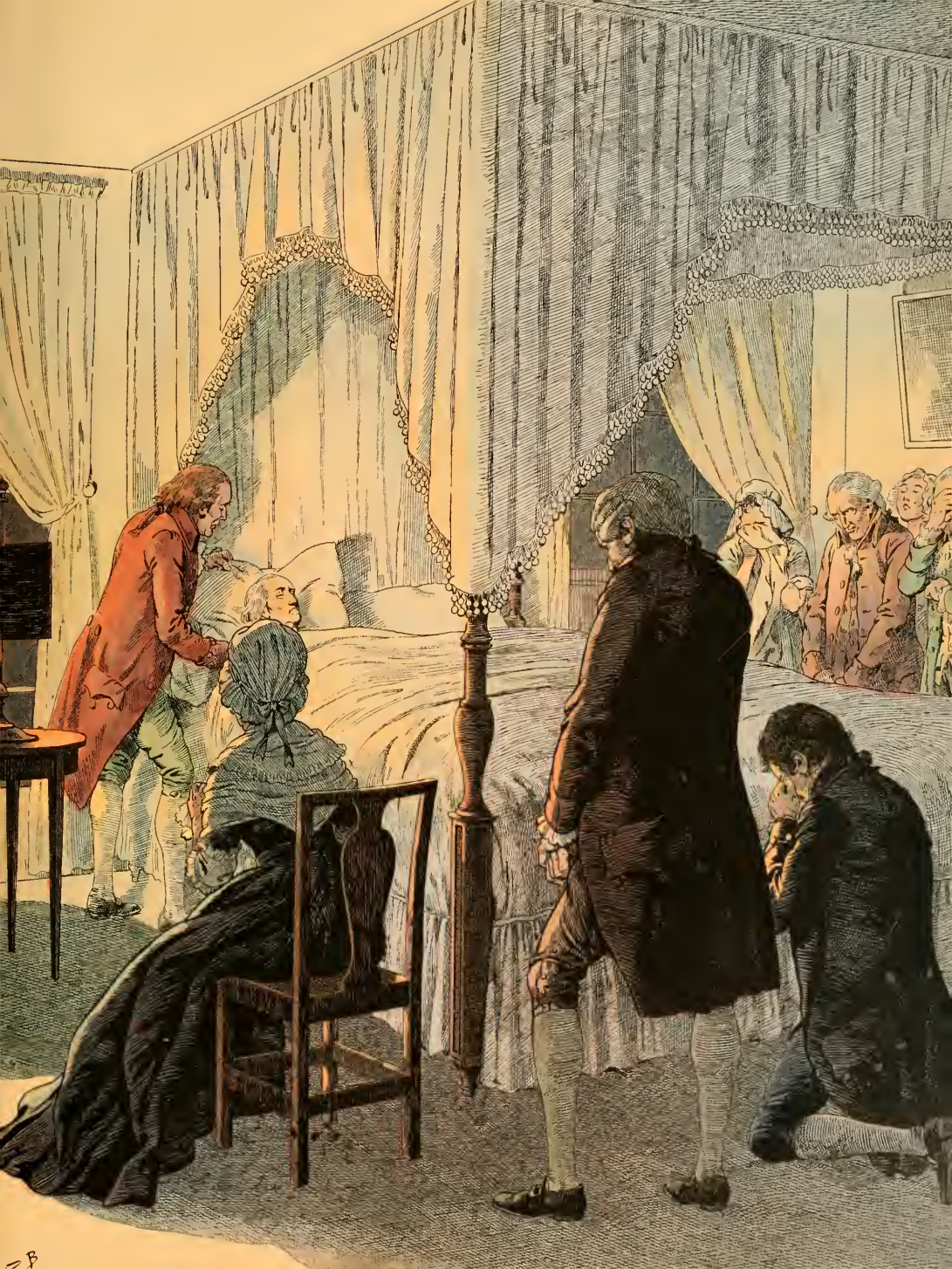
NO pomp or ceremony distinguished the inauguration of Washington as the first President of the United States, but the proceedings were dignified and impressive and the new chief magistrate showed by his words and bearing that he fully realized the grave responsibility which rested upon him. He understood that all he said or did during his administration would form a pre-

cedent for good or evil to those who succeeded him in the mighty office with which he had been entrusted, and his constant aim was to advance the interests and standing of the United States and assure the young republic a place among the nations of the earth. This soon brought him into conflict with Governor Hancock of Massachusetts, who insisted that the dignity of his State demanded that the President should not take precedence over its chief ruler on ceremonial occasions. He therefore declined to call on Washington when the latter visited Massachusetts, but

when it was explained to him that the representative of no one State could consider himself superior to the representative of all the States combined, he yielded and this comparatively trivial incident went far toward establishing the National authority at home. His effort to gain recognition for the country abroad was not, however, so readily accepted by the people. Indeed for a time the rather one-sided treaty which he negotiated with Great Britain brought a storm of popular protest. But the President knew that an even more unfavorable treaty

with the mother country at that moment would have been far better than none, and he disregarded the public clamor, preferring to lose his own popularity rather than miss an opening for advancing the prestige of the Republic. Again he did not hesitate to offend the then powerful adherents of France when the representatives of that nation sought to take undue liberties with the United States. There were, of course, many who resented this and everything else that was done to enforce the national supremacy, but Washington steadily pursued the policy

The Death of Washington
(December 14, 1799)



which he realized was necessary if the former loose confederation of States was to become a real Nation. Indeed when certain riotous Pennsylvanians undertook to resist the laws of Congress, he did not hesitate to summon troops to support the Federal authorities, and putting himself at their head, suppressed the incipient rebellion without the firing of a shot.

All this firmness and independence made enemies for the President, but the popular demand for his continuance in office at the end of his first term was so general that it might

fairly be said to be unanimous. Nevertheless, he hesitated to accept the call, and had he consulted his own wishes he would have retired to Mount Vernon and the quiet life of the plantation for which his soul yearned. He yielded, however, to the plea that he had no right to abandon the people at a critical stage of their experiment in popular government, and he was rewarded by fretting ingratitude and shamefully unjust criticism. Indeed, March 4, 1797, when John Adams was inaugurated as his successor, was probably the happiest day Washington

knew during the whole of his second term. His critics and slanderers did not, however, represent the people, and on his retirement from office the sensitive, high-minded public servant was greeted with an outburst of popular affection which must have shown him the real heart of the nation.

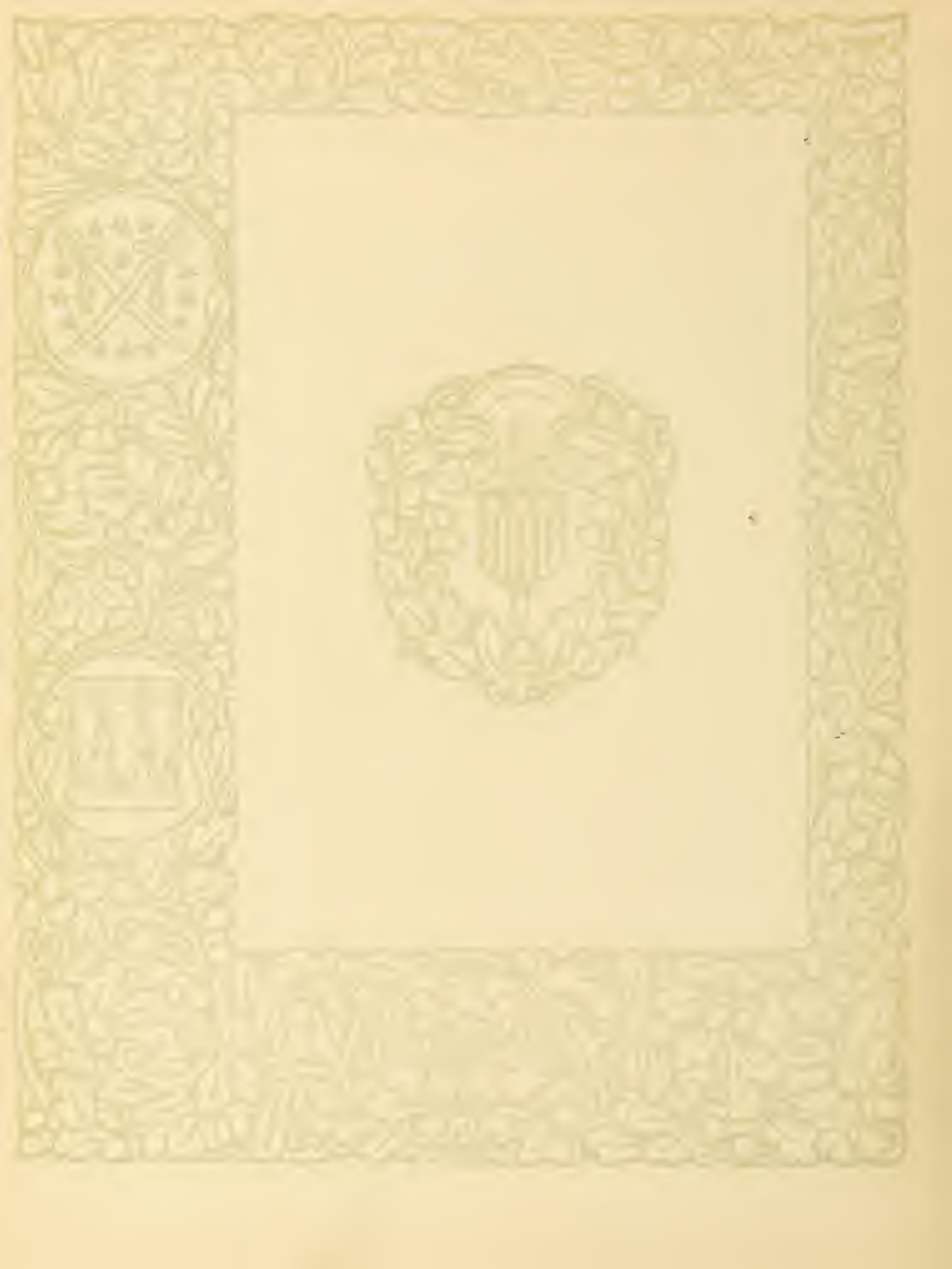
CHAPTER XXI

HOME

WASHINGTON'S second home-coming was even more joyous than his first. On each occasion he had been absent for eight years, but his service during the war had not told as heavily on him as his presidential duties had, and after the storm and stress of politics Mount Vernon offered such a haven of rest and peace that he wrote General Knox that he never expected to

be twenty miles away from it during the remainder of his natural life. There was plenty of work to be done on the place, for much that he had begun during his former years of peace had to be done again, and he had elaborate plans for further beautifying and cultivating the estate. Into this happy labor he threw himself heart and soul, superintending every detail personally and often remaining in the saddle practically all day. He could not devote his whole time to this congenial occupation, however, for he was forced to write or dictate an enormous

number of letters each day to stem the flood of correspondence which poured in upon him. Moreover, visitors continued to throng the house, and the presence of several permanent guests, including his adopted grandchild, Nellie Custis, and young George Washington Lafayette, the General's son, served to divert his attention. The company of the young people added greatly to his pleasure, but the strangers who called to procure his autograph, to paint his portrait, to present books, poems and music which had been dedicated to him, and to ask



WASHINGTON
FAMILY.

his opinion on all sorts of questions, were a trial to his patience and a strain on his hospitality. Nevertheless, they were all received with courtesy and the home life went happily on until April, 1798, when news suddenly arrived from France that the American envoys to that country had been treated with insult and that the country must prepare for war. How thoroughly the people were united was well demonstrated by their instant response to the call. The organizing of a formidable army was promptly begun, and Washington was given

supreme command, with the rank of Lieutenant-General, but no war resulted, for France quickly made the proper disclaimers of intention to offend. Still the emergency took the master of Mount Vernon further away from his hearthstone than he had ever expected to be, and for a few months the quiet routine of his life was interrupted. As soon as the war clouds passed, however, he resumed his farming duties, and in April, 1799, he began a survey of his property. This he supplemented by a written plan, covering thirty pages, for the future development

and care of the estate. A day or so after he finished this elaborate series of schedules and instructions he was suddenly taken ill with acute laryngitis, and on Friday, December 13, 1799, after one night of suffering, he passed quietly away in the presence of his loved ones.

Only a few neighbors and friends accompanied his body to its resting place in his adored Mount Vernon, which remains a perfect setting for his memory—its beauty, dignity and majestic calm reflecting the unselfish, modest and inspiring life that helped to mould a mighty nation.

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